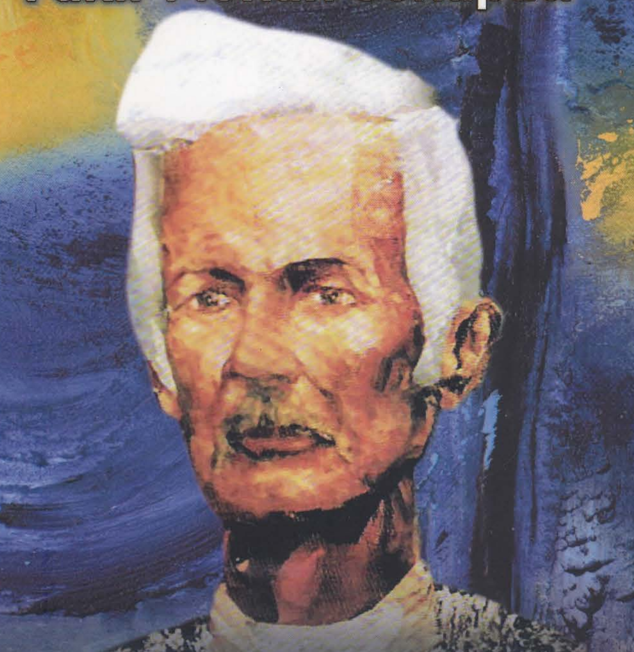
Memoirs and More of an Insider

A CLOSE BRUSH WITH THE RELICS OF A LEGEND CALLED Fakir Mohan Senapati



Dr. Monica Das

Great granddaughter of Vyasa Kavi Fakir Mohan Senapati

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A close brush with the relics of a legend called
Fakir Mohan Senapati

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VYASA KAVI FAKIR MOHAN SENAPATI (1843-1918)

A Bio Note

Fakir Mohan Senapati is a giant in the field of Indian literature who belonged to Odisha. He created a revolution in novel writing by departing from the romantic idiom and writing on social realism. His portrayal of the common man and his concerns predated those of Prem Chand and Rabindra Nath Tagore, the other giants of Indian literature, as noted in Prof Sisir Das' work, *The History of Indian Literature*. His writing had elements which apart from promoting secular attitudes, helped bring about social changes, to which he also contributed directly as the dewan of some of the princely states of Odisha, in British India. Odisha is the first state in India to have been established on the basis of its language, for which he laid the groundstone. He in fact fought against various odds to save the language from extinction, and is hailed as the father of Modern Odiya literature. Fakir Mohan's writing speaks to us today with the same urgency and freshness as when he set down his words with a quill pen over a century ago. Fakir Mohan Senapati can, in the true sense be dubbed as a renaissance man.

A film (*Anvesan*) made by his great granddaughter Dr. Monica Das, and produced by Doordarshan Archives/Doordarshan (Government of India) documents all this and more. DVD's of the film are available for purchase with Doordarshan (Prasar Bharti), a Government of India television channel.

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Foreword

When we think of great writers, we tend to see them as loftily elevated above the constraints and concerns of everyday life. It appears as if their magnificent achievements imprison them in a kind of grand isolation, and the focus on their works gradually shifts attention away from the prosaic details of the lived reality from which they emerge. As a result, great writers turn into towering monuments – inaccessible, awe-inspiring, but cold and lifeless. Biographies and memoirs are useful ways of reminding us that they were intensely human and seek to restore to them their essential humanity. In fact, their greatness flows from their being, as Auden said of Yeats, "silly like us".

Monica Das' fascinating account of a life lived in the shadow of her great grandfather, Vyasa Kavi Fakir Mohan Senapati, the father of modern Odia novel, admirably performs this task. The narrative of her discovery of Fakir Mohan's place in her life and the meaning of his legacy, chiefly centres around the house Fakir Mohan had built in Bakhrabad in Cuttack and the house in Balasore where he spent the closing years of his life. The life lived in the house in Bakhrabad is lovingly recreated and a strong sense of place is vividly conveyed by Monica Das. Inhabited by the daughters of Mohini Mohan, the illustrious philosopher-son of the legendary novelist, the house is dense with memories associated with the writer. In fact, many of the trees that grew in the garden surrounding the house were planted by Fakir Mohan himself. However, while recounting the

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experiences of spending her childhood days at the house in Bakhrabad, Monica Das does more than evoke a lost world of enchantment, and renders the texture of daily life lived in Cuttack years ago. Recounting details of people and events, objects and artifacts, customs and festivals, enrich this account of a world that has become memory. Social historians will find much that is valuable in the narrative.

Left to themselves, legacies of the great can often languish and sink into oblivion. Much has been done to celebrate Fakir Mohan's significant contribution to literature, but much remains to be done. A part of this memoir dwells on Monica Das' efforts in these directions. The establishment of the Fakir Mohan Foundation, and the activities it has carried out over the past few years have significantly contributed to the process of giving Vyasa Kavi Fakir Mohan Senapati greater visibility at the national and international levels.

I am sure the reader will find going through this memoir an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

Jatindra Kumar Nayak*

Jatindra Kumar Nayak former Professor of English Literature is an eminent translator, literary critic, columnist, editor and educationist from Odisha. He taught at Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, for many years, and has recently retired. He has had his college education in Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, and University of Oxford.

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Acknowledgement

Inspiration is of essence. Inspiration is something that has everything in it. It provides the driving force; ideas spring up from nowhere, one experiences the adrenaline rush to get up and do things with a sense of purpose. It all came firstly from my ancestors, and then popped up from all around me through eminent people and dear friends. I feel blessed. Needless to say, the spirit of the divine has always goaded me. I wish to express my gratitude to eminent Professors and thinkers such as Prof. Jatindra Kumar Nayak, Dr. J.P. Das, Prof. Debendra Dash and many others, for their abiding good wishes. I am immensely thankful to Prof. Jayadev Misra, Emeritus Professor, recently elected to join the National Academy of Engineering, USA, Dr. Sitakanta Dash of US Lab, Justice Ananga Patnaik, former Justice Supreme Court of India, for their support and precious words that served to inspire me. I am also thankful to my husband, Mr. Udaya Bhanu Das, for his unstinting support, my son Kaustubh's love and affection, my in-laws, especially, my father- in-law, Dr. Radha Charan Das' words of encouragement and of course, many of my dear friends without whose love, I would not have been able to write my 'Memoirs'. I also wish to specially thank Dr. Rabindra Das, from Viswa Bharati University, for his abiding moral support. A task which at first appeared full of trepidation became as easy as cake walk once I started putting it down on pen and paper. I do not lay claims to my literary proficiency here, all that is there just came out straight from the heart.

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My special thanks to Dr. Shatarupa Sinha, my colleague from Delhi University who has been extremely kind in rendering timely help with the editing work. I extend my sincere gratitude to Prof. Jatin Nayak for his valuable support and endorsement which worked like magic for my book. His foreword would make a lot of sense to all the readers of the world. Last but not the least, I wish to mention that I was truly overwhelmed by the enthusiastic response that I got from Mr Lalit Mansingh while going through my book. His wonderful comments hold a lot of value to this kind of work. I, most humbly, dedicate this work, a labour of love, to the readers of the world in general and to readers in India in particular.

> "To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?"
>
> – Marcus Tullius Cicero

Dr. Monica Das
February 2019

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CHAPTER 1

First Awakenings

I woke up one morning, dewy eyed, when I was hardly seven years of age, and reflected on the big house where I was dropped by my mother every single morning. This big house was almost like a mystery house. It was rather fascinating with its many rooms and its lush green garden with a variety of exotic plants, tall coconut and other fruiting trees, sprawling verandas, high ceilings, French windows and a dingy steep stair case that led to a terrace and opened up to a panoramic view of the area around and beyond. In short, for a seven-year-old girl, it was nothing short of a maze, enough to get lost in its alleys. It presented a perfect setting of a fantasy world. The house had high raised walls like the walls of a villa, and held inside an area which was nearly an acre in dimension. It was cut off from the rest of the innocuous surroundings outside. I lived in this interesting world during the day and had to return in the evening to the nondescript rented house of my parents which was on the banks of river "Kathajodi" in Cuttack. However, on several occasions, I stayed back in the big house with my grandmother (Hiranprabha Senapati, who was Fakir Mohan Senapati's daughter-in-law). The big house was built by none other than the legendary Vyasa Kavi, Fakir Mohan Senapati and exists till date in 'Dhuanpatria Sahi', Bakhrabad, Cuttack, Odisha.

My mother, Binapani Misra (nee Senapati) was Fakir Mohan Senapati's granddaughter and Mohini Mohan Senapati's

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daughter. She was a school teacher in Ravenshaw Girls' High School in Cuttack, and was one of the pioneer women educationists of her times. She had topped in the Matriculation examinations, and had received the Queen Mary's medal (which I still preserve as a valued treasure). She did her BA from Calcutta University. Her major discipline was Mathematics, but her proficiency was no less in English. She went on to do her B.Ed. in Shillong. She was trained in the Montessori course under Madam Montessori (Dr. Maria Montessori) herself in Adyar, Madras. My mother was very proud of this fact, and I recollect how fondly she used to recount her memories concerning this. In due course, she got firmly rooted in a teaching career and worked in various schools in Odisha including Ravenshaw Girls' High School in Cuttack, Capital Boys School in Bhubaneswar, which became Capital Girls High School later. There she was appointed the headmistress (Principal). Thereafter, she went on to become the headmistress of Barabati Girls High School in Balasore where she served as the headmistress for almost ten years. Later she was promoted and became the District Inspectress of Schools for three districts in western Orissa. Her official headquarters was in Sambalpur. In fact, she continued working even after her retirement, and was chosen to be the Child Welfare Organiser for the whole of Odisha. Her office was located within the premises of the Governor's House, Bhubaneswar. The governor then was Hon'ble Shri B.D. Jatti. We lived close by in the quarters allotted to her. My mother's official tours to Delhi concerning meetings of the child welfare organisation used to happen occasionally, and on one such trip I had accompanied her to Delhi. In fact, that was my first brush with the capital city of Delhi and as luck would have it, in due course I came to settle down in Delhi after taking up a teaching career in Delhi University.

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My father, Shri Kasinath Misra was the star student of Madras Presidency College and later went on to become a professor in Mathematics at St. Xavier's College and Loreto College, Calcutta University. He was extraordinarily well-endowed with intellectual capabilities and extremely good looks to boot. He also had a disarming smile and endearing manners that helped to complete the persona. However, he did not achieve any success in the conventional sense of the term. He was a dreamer of sorts, and had a checkered career. The eminent writer Gopinath Mohanty always used to wonder how a man with no conventional occupation could always be so happy, and used to describe him as 'Anandamurti'. He used to say, "It is a sheer pleasure to see him and talk to him".

A seven-year-old or even a ten-year-old of yesteryears does not harbour any pride in all this until she is often told by people around her as she grew up, what a brilliant parentage she had. As I grew up to be a teen, and in fact, when I was in the last of my teens, all this faded into insignificance so far as the pride element was concerned, for I was made to realise by people around and not so much by relatives that there was this big Banyan Tree called Fakir Mohan Senapati to whose lineage I belong.

All this would have been clean forgotten, for I went to do my pre-University science course in Lady Brabourne College, Calcutta and was lost in the new-found glory of being in a famed metropolis. Along with it I was also star struck by the premier institution's striking ambience under the pre-eminent philosopher scholar Prof. Rama Choudhary who was the principal then. Incidentally, prior to that, at the age of 15+, I was admitted to Saila Bala Mahila College for a few months for my pre-University science course. There, the Odiya professors, my hostel friends and batchmates often referred to Fakir Mohan

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Senapati. Unfortunately, till then, it had never dawned on me that Fakir Mohan Senapati was the root we had grown out of. I often used to hear about him from here and there. I was a wide-eyed and a gaping-mouthed teenager who was dazzled by the magnificence of the legacy of a bright star called Fakir Mohan Senapati. It sort of blinded me and numbed my senses. I was over-awed. I realised that I was too insignificant in the wide canvas of Odisha's rich literary legacy and nation-building heritage, where Fakir Mohan Senapati was considered a revered icon. To add to my discomfort, my mother would often say "Aame sabu Fakir Mohanankara ajogya bansadhara" (We are unworthy descendants of Fakir Mohan Senapati).

Now this takes me back to my grandmother, Smt. Hiranprabha Senapati (Fakir Mohan Senapati's daughter-in-law and Mohini Mohan Senapati's wife), with whom I had spent most of the impressionable years of my childhood. As mentioned earlier, there was this daily ritual of my being dropped at my grandmother's house regularly during my preschool days, and beyond as well but less frequently. My grandmother acted as a surrogate mother. I feel emotionally charged as I recall her tender care and, not just that, the quality time I spent with her especially with regard to becoming aware of the glory surrounding Fakir Mohan Senapati. Listening to my grandmother's firsthand account of her close interaction with the legend was always a treat. In fact, now it makes more sense than it did earlier.

I heard my mother say that my grandmother was specially chosen by Fakir Mohan Senapati to be his daughter-in-law. My grandmother Hiranprabha Senapati was born of Bengali parents and hailed from Dacca. She was a Matriculate of those days (maybe 1900 or earlier), and was a brilliant piano player. I still have memories of her melodious singing at Brahmo Samaj

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meetings to the accompaniment of her piano in Cuttack. Not just that, very often we used to go up to the terrace of the Bakhrabad House in Cuttack with my grandmother and some cousins, and there she would sing with abandon. We cousins were her captive audience. She had a quiet dignity about her and always under-played her talents. She was an avid reader; books were her constant companions and we always found Bankim Chandra's and Tagore's novels lying around her bedside. She was an excellent cook, a meticulous home-maker and home keeper, a passionate stitch-smith, and was always full of grace. She used to make beautiful embroidery, traces of which might still be found in the big Bakhrabad house even now. As a child I used to marvel at her multifaceted personality.

During the days I spent at Bakhrabad house, I was often fascinated by a big iron chest (luha sindhuka), which was placed on top of a big wooden cupboard (now of immense value as an antique). This cupboard stood on the way to the bathroom. So, every day at least 2-3 times I had a glimpse of the large mysterious looking iron chest. I assumed that children were denied access to it. My grandmother was a perfect housekeeper and kept a watchful eye on everything. She occasionally asked the servants to climb the cupboard and clean it up, perhaps to ensure that the contents of the chest are not invaded by white ants, insects and rodents. I was told that it contained various manuscripts and other things of value related to Fakir Mohan Senapati – in short, FM's relics. I, a bleary-eyed 10-year-old then, hardly realised what value it could have for the world. It nevertheless held a lot of fascination for me – a strange kind of mystery surrounds a carefully preserved object, and the untold story that it held in its interiors can be something that is definitely intriguing. My mind often used to wonder whether someday I would be able to find out what it contains. The

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exciting idea of a treasure hunt was planted in a ten-year old's mind.

Unfortunately, even to this day, the mystery remains unsolved. The other day when Professor Adhikary, Vice Chancellor of Fakir Mohan University, invited me to a three-day symposium held to commemorate the legend Fakir Mohan's literary contributions, I referred to this chest in my talk. I was surprised to find that this mention held tremendous fascination for many students, teachers and researchers. They all wished to know more as to what the chest holds and hoped that someday maybe the mystery could be unraveled. Most likely, they hoped it contained FM Senapati's rare manuscripts. The hunt is on.

This house hitherto referred to as 'Bakhrabad' house was built by Fakir Mohan Senapati, as mentioned earlier. It seemed to me that, as was characteristic of him, he had taken a personal interest in the layout of the entire premises including the garden. There were various plants of decorative value. They are still there. Some were exotic plants that caught the eye of people in general, and plant lovers in particular. Even to this day one rarely gets to see such plants. The 'Jamrul' tree received our (cousins') special attention. My grandmother, whom we used to address as "didima", used to tell us that this tree Fakir Mohan Senapati had personally procured for our garden in the Bakhrabad house. I sometimes used to stay over in this house for a protracted period of time. I never objected to this for I used to enjoy my stay there. The huge house with its high ceilings and black beans and rafters (kadi baraga) used to hold a lot of interest for me. Of course, it goes without saying that I enjoyed the company of my cousins. Incidentally, I am the only child of my parents and an only child is always a lonely child. Now I realise that my thoughtful and loving mother intentionally used to leave me at the Bakhrabad house for two

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reasons: one is to leave me in the safe hands of my didima, and secondly, to let me have the company of my cousins. As I was growing up, I also used to visit my grandma off and on all through my school and college going years and a little beyond. During the summer months, all our cousins, my aunts, grandma for sure and at times, my mother would all sprawl on the red polished drawing room floor to take their afternoon siesta. As for me, staring at the vast ceiling with its black beams and rafters and the creaky fan moving at a slow speed was something that gave me immense pleasure for years on end. The memory still lingers on. Life had a pleasant rhythm about it and was so very different from what it is now. This was indeed a part of our daily living, and I have the nostalgia even to this day.

It was mandatory for us kids to take an afternoon nap, and it goes without saying that this was not at all to our liking. Often when the elders slipped into a deep slumber, we kids made many unsuccessful attempts and some successful ones at sneaking out, and escaped into the huge terrace called the 'chhata' to breathe freely, play and do what we like. The other attraction was to steal the goodies that were freshly prepared and stored in the storeroom (bhandar ghar) and help ourselves to the mouth-watering pickles (aachar) made by "didima". She was acknowledged as a great cook and loved feeding people with her various home-made snacks and goodies.

At times, there used to be lavish dinners and luncheons laid out for guests. Even the daily food preparations were nothing short of a feast. We all used to sit around a big black oval table in the dining room and have our meals together. Meal times had to be adhered to by everybody and it was an unspoken law sanctified through its strict observance.

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Utensils used in that house those days were made if heavy brass, which included tumblers/glasses used for drinking water. We did not have to serve ourselves the dishes for there were servants who were assigned the duty of serving us the food – especially rice and daal. Special delicacies like fish preparations and other non-vegetarian items, and special vegetarian dishes used to be served by didima and our youngest aunt with great love and care. The delectable dishes were served course wise. Didima used to keep a watchful eye on my plate (brass plate) to see whether I was eating well or not, and whether I was able to negotiate the bones of the fish so that enough of the protein goes into my system. She used to help me at times with the fish and mix it with the rice so that the intended morsels made their way to my tummy.

When I think of it tears well up in my eyes. What a rare treat that was. This further takes me to the years when a child is referred to as a milk sop. My didima used to stretch me on her lap and hold my head tenderly in position, and fill the "silver samuka" (a kind of small spoon shaped in such a way that the administration of the liquid, in this case, milk, can be done easily with no spill or minimum spills). Didima holding the 'samuka' steadily in her right hand, used to dip it into the silver bowl kept on the ground filled with hot milk. She used to lift the silver samuka and after feeling the temperature by dipping one finger into the milk, sometimes blowing air from her mouth to cool it down and then carefully directed it to its destination – my mouth. The milk came from our own home-bred cows, and I remember how huge pots of milk used to be boiling on the big kitchen fire (chuli) almost all day long. It's been sixty years now and I still retain and cherish the memory.

These cooking places called "chulis" used wood and sometimes cooking coal as fuel. I can still smell the aroma; it

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haunts me even now. The aroma was a mixture of fresh cow's milk with a smoky flavour and the sweet body odour of my 'didima' emanating from within the folds of her sari. All this was a heady something, and strangely enough I still can recall the aroma. Didima was a very sophisticated lady who laid particular emphasis on hygiene and aesthetics. I still remember how she used to chase us kids, and specially me, around the big house to apply fresh cream from the cooled down milk. This was to ensure that we have beautiful skin. Thanks to her, I was admired for my bright skin for a long time when I was young. This, however, is all past glory now.

I wish to dwell on the kitchen and its adjoining room "bhandar ghara" a little longer. The kitchen and bhandar ghara (store house) were moderately big, and the servants under the direct supervision of 'didima' kept these places immaculately clean and well organised. The shelves had bright shining silver and brass utensils of different shapes and sizes, and on one side were kept huge piles of potatoes and onions.

Fresh vegetables were bought in daily. The designated vendor used to come every morning to spread his wares in front of 'didima' in the huge verandah (agana). Didima used to perch herself on a raised "pidha" (a narrow wooden stool) and inspect the vegetables, admiring some and rejecting some others, and in the process deriding the vendor for not taking enough care in getting the vegetables of her choice and of the required quality. Didima was very particular not only about the freshness of the vegetables but also the way they were required to be cut into the prescribed shapes and sizes. The servants, whom I would prefer calling 'house attendants', especially the head cook, were often reprimanded for the breach of its observance. The whole ritual of the vegetable shopping at home was a very fascinating affair for us kids. We used to squat on the floor and were mostly silent

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spectators of the whole deal. The same held true for the fish vendor who used come with fresh catches in a big cane basket. He would carry his own huge "panki" (the big sharp curved knife fixed on a wooden stand which could accommodate only one foot, to facilitate cutting and dressing the fish). Fish was treated almost as a vegetable. We were allowed to witness its evisceration, but the same thing was not permitted so far as chickens and goats were concerned.

It was perhaps her strict instruction that chicken (called kukuda) should not be dressed/ cut within the sight of children. For this purpose, the whole act of slaying the chicken was done behind the bushes somewhere in the garden. Us kids, however, could catch a glimpse or two of the live ones brought in for the purpose. Our young minds perhaps never bothered to put two and two together, and make any analysis or reach any conclusions regarding the mouth-watering eye-catching chicken curry that was served to us.

This was followed by the preparation of the spices and condiments. Some were ground on a huge implement made of rock called (shila) and a pestle (pua) to go with it. Even the consistency of the ground spices mattered. These were then used to turn out dishes that could be labeled as culinary perfections. The whole process would unfold under the strict vigilance of didima.

It was all part of the natural flow of things. On the breakfast table was laid out a huge brass plate every morning containing almost one dozen poached eggs. The cook used to bring all the poached eggs together, not like now when each egg is poached for each individual separately. That, indeed, was a very rare sight. I still have vivid memories of it. We young ones were cajoled into having our share and more, if we so wished,

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along with bread bought from the market. Huge buttered slices adorned the table as did the poached eggs. Parathas and 'dalpuris' with the accompanying 'aaloo tarkari' from the famous 'Dam Maharaj' hotel, however, were occasional departures from the normal breakfast menu.

Then came even more elaborate affair of the afternoon lunch. There used to be at least a ten-course luncheon which was served in a proper sequence starting with some bitter dish like 'shukta' prepared with bitter gourd or neem leaves with brinjals, followed by spinach and potatoes prepared with a paste made out of poppy seeds, then a spicy dish made of any seasonal vegetable like cauliflower and the like, followed by 2-3 types of fish/mutton preparations. Sweet chutney was a must and the whole course used to end with sweet curd and a sweet dish. All this lavish culinary fare of course needed to be digested at leisure. So, an afternoon nap or 'siesta' was almost a daily ritual. The bright red polished cemented floors were cleaned up for the purpose earlier by the house attendants and the huge hall accommodated all the family members for lying sprawled all over the spacious floor with great abandon. We kids used to spread out in all directions as we pleased, and waited for our elders to drop off into a deep slumber so that we could be free to engage in our little pranks with full freedom.

Once all our elders dozed off, my cousins, especially my cousin brother, used to coax me to take out the bunch of keys securely tied to my grandma's "aanchal" (end of the saree which is thrown over the shoulder and worn by housewives to make sure the keys are in safe keeping). I was told by my cousins that "didima" has a special soft corner for me because I was practically being brought up by her. So, I was assigned this job and I had to do it albeit with a lot of trepidation. Now, this was a rather tricky job and, given all the values instilled in me by my

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teacher-mother about honesty and good conduct, it was hard to act as they wished me to. Stealing was a big no and it was definitely against my grains but, on the other hand, I did not wish to displease my cousins, especially my big brother. Cousins on their part would not give up and tried convincing me that "didima" would turn a blind eye to this minor misconduct because she had an extra soft spot for me. My cousin brother would go a little further and tempt me with a promise to pluck for me half-ripened guavas from the biggest tree in the backyard in return for this favour. This was quite a motivation for me for as I had a great weakness for freshly plucked half-ripe guavas. So, the deal would be struck. Keeping the cousins in good humor was always a good policy, I thought to myself. I had no siblings of my own and hence for me cousins held a special position. So, I decided to get the key by creeping up to my grand mom. As it is, she used to make me stay by her side as far as possible. With my nimble fingers, I would unite the bunch of keys which gave us access to the store house with all the attractive homemade savories, sweetmeats and mouthwatering "aachar" (pickles). Didima used to turn on her side and I have a strong suspicion that this was due to her feelings of indulgence for me. This she perhaps did for facilitating my task of accessing the bunch of keys. Voila! So, there we were with our mission accomplished. However, I was a little timid so far as the plundering of the store room was concerned. So, I kept from actually laying hands on 'didima's closely guarded special preparations. I would rather wait for it to be served at tea time which in any case was just a few hours away. However, when the booty was distributed by the leader of the pack of cousins, I could hardly resist tasting a portion of it, though very gingerly. Then the reverse operation followed. The bunch of keys was to be tied back to the 'aanchal'. It was quite a job but definitely less challenging than the earlier one. Amidst childish pranks and

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playful hours, my childhood days passed in the company of my cousins. Otherwise, an only child would have been unbearably lonely.

Bakhrabad house was the world for me. I sometimes wonder whether Fakir Mohan Senapati, while building this house, had his grandchildren and great grandchildren in mind. In fact, this house was built towards the tail end of his life. Unfortunately, I did not have the good luck to see him or be with him, but through the eyes of my "didima" (Fakir Mohan Senapati's daughter-in-law) I could get a vivid glimpse of the person that he was. My grandma was the mirror that reflected his persona. During lazy afternoons on a rainy day or even at bedtime, my grandma would narrate little stories and situations concerning Fakir Mohan Senapati. She used to say that he was fond of good food and was a tender-hearted man; though with his son Mohini Mohan he was a little stern, and the father and the son never saw eye to eye. This was quite natural, for Mohini Mohan, a judge in those days, later a Professor of Philosophy in a leading educational institution called Ravenshaw College, was an intellect of repute in his own right. It was natural that he held dear his own views concerning various matters. Mohini Mohan was not just an agnostic, he was an atheist to boot. Though I have had no direct exposure to my grandfather Mohini Mohan, I have the good fortune of hearing about him from my mother, Binapani and from my grandmother Hiranprabha Senapati. I was told about Mohini Mohan Senapati's strong views regarding religion and God. The general perception about him was that he did not generally believe in superstitions, and dismissed idol worship and temple rituals. It is quite natural that his children (four daughters) must have been influenced by his rationalistic views. Let me recount an incident narrated by my mother: there was a temple that stood near Bakhrabad house. This attracted

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the attention of the kids (Senapati sisters) and one day, they sat out to destroy the Shiva Linga that was housed in the temple. Being bought up by such a progressive father, his children i.e. my mother and her three sisters nursed radical feelings about ritualistic worship in temples. The temple priest, however, was a kind-hearted person, and dismissed this as a childish prank. He lovingly persuaded the kids to refrain from such iconoclastic acts, and that was the end of it.

I came to know that, though my grandfather Mohini Mohan Senapati was an atheist and a rationalist, however, he did deviate from his avowed path once in a while. As they say, Homer does nod at times. I would recount here an incident narrated to me by my mother. Mohini Mohan Senapati had this fad about No. 13. He would never do anything that had even a remote association with the Number 13. So once there was this 'Ekkagadi' (one horse-driven carriage) in which he was to leave for the railway station to undertake a journey to some place outside Cuttack. The luggage was loaded. Servants made sure everything was ready when suddenly he turned around to look at the rear of the cart to find it had the number plate marked 13. He immediately instructed the servants to unload the luggage and made an about turn and headed back to the house. Strangely enough, years later, he died on the 13th day of a month.

My mother, it was believed, was his favorite daughter and as a very progressive person he used to dissuade her from getting married. Mohini Mohan used to say getting married and begetting children is for ordinary mortals. You "Binapani" are made of a finer stuff. You should excel in academic pursuits and became an achiever". He told my mother that she was named Binapani by Fakir Mohan himself. Her name finds mention in Fakir Mohan's will. I have seen it myself when I was in Balasore in the course of the shooting of my film "*Anvesan*". Shri

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Brajanath Rath, the eminent writer and President of Fakir Mohan Sahitya Parishad showed it to me. He is no more, but his son possesses it, we are told.

Now coming back to my mother, she was very attached to her father, my grandfather Mohini Mohan Senapati. His word was law, and hence she discarded the thought of marriage from her mind. But unfortunately, Mohini Mohan Senapati died quite early. He was in his early sixties. My mother was heart-broken; her dreams were shattered, and for her the world seemed dark and hopeless, but winter always turns into spring and the Almighty's designs soon brightened up things for her. While she was doing her Bachelors in Calcutta University, she came in contact with many interesting people. One of them was my father, Kasinath Misra, who was a professor in St. Xavier's and Loreto College, Calcutta University. He was also her teacher.

Her friends persuaded her to get married to him. My two aunts by then had got married and had family and children of their own. Interestingly enough, I remember my mother telling me that my aunt Maitreyi Shukla (nee Senapati) had told her "Binu, don't worry my dear, I will give birth to intelligent children and you can bring them up". This seemed a good proposition to my simple-minded mother, for whom marriage and family of her own were alien concepts. Her friends, however, were unrelenting. They kept up their constant refrain and said, 'Bina, my dear, don't get swayed emotionally, get married and have a family of your own and here was this six-foot-tall, very fair young man with a broad forehead, blue eyes and an aquiline nose – Kasinath Misra, a well-educated professor waiting for a nod from you. Just go ahead and take the plunge – for all you know it might not be a plunge into darkness as you imagine it to be. It could open the doors to a rosy future.

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So, the marriage happened. Good days were followed by struggles as is the way of the world.

My father was a dreamer and not so worldly wise, on top of that he was not the daring young man that he appeared to be. He was a cultured man and had a cerebral disposition. The violent strife that filled the pre-partition days unsettled him. Those were the pre-independence days (1944-47) – Hindu Muslim riots were an everyday affair. This was too much for him and, without consulting my mother, one fine morning, he just resigned from his job as professor at Loreto and St. Xavier's College Calcutta University. He was also private tutor of the father of the present Mr. Birla. The whole burden of running the household fell on my mother. Then came their offspring. Two boys died soon after birth and me, the girl child survived. Binapani, my mother, who was raised in right royal style in the Fakir Mohan Senapati house was not used to the rough and tumble of life, found it difficult to cope with the day-to-day problems of running a household, raising a girl child and handling a teaching job at the same time.

So, to find a way out of this, she delegated the duty of mothering me to my grandma, whom I fondly used to address as "didima" like all my other cousins. With her I spent the most impressionable years of my childhood. This was perhaps pre-ordained for without this I would not have got an exposure to the order of things at the centre of which stood Fakir Mohan Senapati. In fact, by and by, I would explain later how it all seemed pre-ordained and things fell into place in the wider jigsaw puzzle.

My mother was a blend of wisdom, a fine sense of aesthetics, a little cynicism and the ability to perform a balancing act in the conduct of her daily life. She was not really the daring

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and the rash kind. She would tread on unknown ground gingerly and take measured steps particularly where I was concerned. She was the headmistress of Barabati Girls High School, Balasore. So, I was destined to study there. Though I with my forward-looking progressive parents, could have been put in India's best hostels/ schools and later in the world's best institutions, she always believed in keeping me under her wings, for which I am thankful. What could be better than being under my parent's 'tutelage'. However, the flipside was, I led a sheltered and cloistered life which perhaps made me a bit timid in nature but at times I showed signs of raring to go, yet I was really not bold enough to go all the way.

All attempts at forging ahead concealed a feeling of trepidation. Something always seemed to be holding me back. My mother, though very stern and for the most part utterly critical of me, used to in one or two of her weak moments say "All said and done, for Monica, sky is the limit – she can achieve anything if she wants", yet she made sure that I was safe and only ventured this far and no further. A mother's little fears and apprehensions were perfectly understandable. So, all along I was thus playing safe, slightly timid yet wishing to go ahead – I went only thus far and no further, the vast potentiality tucked away safely inside me somewhere. I was always doing the balancing act of going about doing things so that they do not cause major disruptions in my life. Even to this day the tendency persists. People have told me to enter politics, give up my teaching career and take up music or follow some other alternative career path. Earlier, when I was in my late teens and early twenties, I was urged to take up civil services as a possible career.

People used to say of me that I could do whatever I wanted to and with flair. But undistracted by all this, I chose to settle for the middle path – teaching and family life, with music

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on the side. I often used to discuss matters concerning Fakir Mohan Senapati and how he could do so much – serve as a Dewan of princely states during British rule performing onerous administrative tasks, and then write great literary works, save the Odiya language from extinction and accomplish many more deeds. My mother, with a distant look in her eyes and a solemn expression on her face, would say, "We all are his unworthy descendants (ajogya bansadhara)." I have often quoted this at various platforms to the amusement of many.

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CHAPTER 2

Mohini Mohan Senapati

Fakir Mohan Senapati was deeply religious in his outlook on life. In his eyes, all religions were equally worthy of respect. The 'Sarva Dharma Samanya Sthamba' built by him in Shanti Kanan, Balasore bears eloquent testimony to his deeply felt conviction. By contrast his son, Mohini Mohan Senapati, was an atheist, or an agnostic, and he held strong views on the subject. My mother, Binapani, on several occasions, had told me that the reason for her father (my grandfather), Mohini Mohan Senapati's radical views were influenced by his study of philosophy apart from other varied influences on his life and his mental make-up. He had come into contact with Bhakta Kabi Madhusudan Rao, and thereafter was attracted to Brahmo Dharma. During 'Upasana' Madhusudan Rao's prayers with their depth and beauty had attracted learned people in Cuttack. Those days in Bengali literary circles, talks centered round the topics of 'sakara' and 'nirakara'. There were heated debates on these. Mohini Mohan Senapati avidly participated in these debates.

My mother used to say that, contrary to actual facts, over the years people have played up the differences between the father and son to such an extent that it appears as if they were opposed to each other in an acutely antagonist way, and were arch rivals. The fact was there was no such hostility between the two at all. There are many proofs that this was not the case. It was just like most father-son relationships where both take

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liberties with each other. Mohini Mohan Senapati was a highly erudite person himself. He was also a highly sensitive person, and felt deep love and admiration for his father, Fakir Mohan Senapati. In fact, recently in the year 2016, when Professor Adhikary, Vice Chancellor of Fakir Mohan University, held a three-day conference on Fakir Mohan's life and works, there was a real confluence of scholars of Fakir Mohan studies from different parts of India. I was invited to speak there about my personal experiences by virtue of being a member of the Fakir Mohan clan, and of having directly descended from him. In that platform also, I spoke about the fictitious nature of the notions held by some people concerning the hostility between the father and son. Hyping this unduly was perhaps borne out of a perverse desire for sensationalism.

My statement was fortunately endorsed by the eminent scholar Debendra Dash (his body of works on Fakir Mohan Senapati is immense, and has been acknowledged as being one of the best of its kind). In this context I would like to ask, "Was it not Mohini Mohan Senapati who compiled Fakir Mohan's works?" "Bibidha Prasanga", written by Mohini Mohan Senapati has various instances where Mohini Mohan Senapati has praised his father profusely. I quote "My father Fakir Mohan Senapati started translating the Mahabharata the year that I was born in. He completed it in the year 1902. One can hardly find instances of such diligence and hard work in the world of literature."

Many subscribe to the view that Mohini Mohan, despite his vast knowledge and independent thinking, has not received the critical attention he so eminently deserves. His radical views echo those of Bertrand Russell. I chanced upon a volume titled, "The Best of Russell". I read it from cover to cover and found that Russell and my grandfather had so much in common. It is rightly said, "All great men think alike."

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My grandfather was a free thinker and was an ardent champion of liberal education. Those days it was considered a departure from accepted conventions, but in many foreign universities these days they are followed rather assiduously. In his time, Mohini Mohan was derided by many for professing such unconventional views. In fact, he was far ahead of his time and wrote on various topics such as the discovery of America, animal rights, women's rights to independent earning, women's education, and the irrelevance of marriage as an institution. His speeches were published in the Statesman, and heated debates followed. His rebuttal was published in the Ananda Bazar Patrika. In this context, I recollect my mother saying that she felt that her father did not get his due recognition because being Fakir Mohan Senapati's son, he was eclipsed by his famous father. My mother said "Fakir Mohan Senapati was like a big banyan tree under whose shade small plants could never thrive".

Mohini Mohan's writings mostly focused on social reforms, philosophical issues and innovative ideas on varied socio-economic and spiritual topics. He suggested radical changes in society, presented almost in the form of prescriptions for the welfare of society. These, perhaps, people found rather hard-hitting and unacceptably bold. Moreover, these topics are always liable to be controversial. Just opposed to this were Fakir Mohan's writings which had tremendous popular appeal. His writings, besides having immense depth of feeling, a profound social vision, humour and social realism, were enlivened by wit, irony and humor. All this was a wholesome brew, and Fakir Mohan became what he is today both nationally and internationally.

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CHAPTER 3

Bakhrabad House and Biju Patnaik

The house had a well to the left of the front part of the house. A very interesting incident happened in connection with the well. This was narrated by my mother and my aunts (FMS's granddaughters). I shall, however, be dwelling on this in due course. Biju Patnaik, the former Chief Minister of Odisha, who in the course of his office had turned into an iconic figure, was in a way a cousin to the Senapati sisters, one of whom was my mother Binapani. Biju Patnaik's father Shri Laxmi Narayan Patnaik had married my grandmother's (Hiranprabha Senapati) sister who died prematurely. Later he married the second time to his late wife's best friend Asha Lata. Biju Patnaik was their progeny. Since Biju Patnaik and my aunts were cousins, and were close to each other, he in his childhood days used to often visit the Bakhrabad house to interact with his cousins and meet my grandparents. Biju Patnaik was especially close to my mother, and they used to get along very well.

Now the interesting incident surrounding the well mentioned earlier on, Biju Patnaik, while looking down into the well all by himself, suddenly fell into it. After sometime people heard voices coming out from inside the well – "I have fallen down, folks come and see me". It was rather hilarious for people around that this young boy is announcing in a very composed tone from within the depths of the well that he is fine inside, and will come out soon perhaps with a little help. Spectators

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around were more alarmed than the boy himself. With a little helping hand, Biju Patnaik could make his climb up the well most successfully. One observes that his daring nature had shown early signs.

Another incident which my mother narrated was related to one particular visit of hers, in later years, to Biju Patnaik's house. My mother, as she entered his drawing room, was first greeted by a young tiger. My mother was shocked and petrified, her voice choked as she was shaken out of her wits and feebly called out "Biju, Biju please help". Biju Patnaik appeared on the scene in no time and took control of the situation. He pacified my mother and asked her to calm down, after which they got talking to each other amidst a huge burst of laughter. Incidentally, the tiger was Biju Patnaik's pet. He asked her not to worry as he would soon hand the tiger over to the forest department. Later, when my mother was the headmistress of Barabati Girls High School, Balasore in the late 1950s, he used to often drop in unannounced to see my mother. I very fondly to this date recall how he used to lift me, throw me up in the air and catch me (I was a petite seven-year-old then).

Later, after a lapse of a considerable period of time (maybe he had by then got so engrossed in his political career that we got to see him seldom) I met him inside an aircraft while travelling from Bhubaneswar to Delhi. Sharp as he was, he spotted me and asked, "Aren't you Binu's daughter?" He used to address my mother as Binu. I had by then just grown out of my teens and the lady-like I was, I decided to be prim and proper. I was especially conscious of the fact that I was talking to the Chief Minister of Odisha. Another interaction with him occurred under strange circumstances when Sri Pranab Patnaik took me along to Pragati Maidan, New Delhi, to sing a bhajan for an event being organised for the chief minister on the

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occasion of Utkal Divas. In fact, Sri Pranab Patnaik was the main singer for the evening. It was indeed so kind of him to give me an opportunity to sing at the very same function. Of course, those days one never thought of things like favours. Everything came in the natural course of things. After the program ended, I could interact with Biju Patnaik only for a very brief spell for reasons of protocol. Unfortunately, that was the last that I saw of him. He was indeed a towering personality, even in the literal sense. He has left an indelible impression on me.

Pranab bhai, as I address Pranab Patnaik, is like an elder brother to me, and his sweet wife Kasturika apa I feel has a special liking for me. The other day, a couple of years ago in 2016, I happened to meet them by chance. We got down to talking about the days gone by, and the question of my interest in music cropped up. In the course of our conversation the topic of my current pre-occupation came up. In the middle of all this he was sweet enough to ask me to sing for him a song or two. I sang a Sufi song which fortunately enough he seemed to like the rendition of. The song was 'Dard se mera daaman bhar de ya allah' originally sung by Lata Mangeshkar. Pranab bhai suggested that I get back to recording songs again. Immediately it struck me why not do a recording of a musical rendition of Fakir Mohan Senapati's poems. He welcomed the idea eagerly, and we got down to working on it. I named the CD 'Mohana Moorchhana'. Fakir Mohan's selected poems were set to music by the leading music director Shri Om Prakash Mohanty, and the voices were lent by singers such as Pranab Patnaik, Sangeeta Goswami, Adyasa Das, Namrata Mohanty and I, Monica Das. The CD has received wide media coverage recently, perhaps because it is one of its kind besides being of a quality of high order. Everything seemed to be gearing towards working around

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Fakir Mohan Senapati. Maybe as someone said "Monica it is your "Tarpana"". This is perhaps what can be termed as being preordained, but in the process my work in the field of Economics and Gender issues took a backseat.

Later, opportunities for interacting with his brother Siju Patnaik, and George Patnaik presented themselves. My mother, and later, I and my husband used to be invited to Siju Patnaik's fashionable house in Vasant Kunj, New Delhi. It was named 'Siju House'. He used to take us to Gymkhana house for the New Year's party. Whenever he got to know that my mother was in town (we used to live in East of Kailash then), he made it a point to come to and see my mother and father every now and then. He, I think, retired as wing commander, and naturally had ways and manners of an army officer. These occasions were very fascinating for me and my son, a toddler then. George Patnaik's daughter, Manju Mohanty and I are to this day very close to each other. We used to talk about the magical yesteryears quite often; our interactions were very frequent until the other day. Now she lives far away. I must mention here the help she rendered in terms of providing me an alternative set up for facilitating the filming of 'Anwesan' on Fakir Mohan Senapati. I therefore feel deeply indebted to her. See how things fall into a previously ordained pattern I had talked about. Her sister-in-law, who is the wife of an eminent zamindar of Balasore, was extremely kind and welcoming in providing us the most suitable ambience, their premises, for the shooting of the film. The whole filming team from Doordarshan almost camped at their house for several days. I was the privileged one, and was housed in their place with special attention showered on me. Living in a 'Sahib Bibi aur Ghulam' type of setting was a real treat, and I should say a bonus for me. I cherish the memory and will continue to do so for many many years to come. I am

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filled with gratitude for their support and wish to thank Manju didi and her husband Mr. Mohanty for their kind gesture. 'Anwesan' would perhaps not have been what it turned out to be without their help. The background to this is that all this happened when I had been refused entry, by the present resident, to Fakir Mohan Senapati's Bakhrabad house for filming 'Anwesan'. Incidentally, the film won an award for the 'Best Telefilm of the Year'.

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CHAPTER 4
Anjan Shukla

The front verandah of the Bakhrabad house, was rather sprawling with a red cemented polished floor. The ceiling was high and had fans. So, it was a comfortable place to spend time. It overlooked the big garden with a huge variety of plants. The borders of the verandah were also adorned with potted plants of the exotic kind. During my childhood days, Fakir Mohan Senapati never crossed my mind ever. How in the world a child of 8-10 years age can imagine that the efforts of a legendary literary figure could also have botanical interests? It was only much later that I got to know from my mother, grandmother and aunts that most of those plants had been procured by Fakir Mohan Senapati himself, including the big Jamrul tree on which we kids used to perch ourselves often. I still might have a picture of that clicked by my eldest cousin brother. Anjan (Pupu dada) was our eldest cousin who used to visit us at times. He was very loving and I particularly looked upon him with awe. His solemn appearance matched his wisdom. He had a camera with which he took our pictures. Didima's face used to acquire a special glow and her eyes used to twinkle at the sight of Pupu dada. These memories are deeply etched in my mind.

Anjan Shukla, whom we cousins used to address as 'Pupu dada', was the son of Maitri Shukla, my aunt who was married to Bachu Bhai Shukla, a Gujarati Brahmin. Maitri Shukla whom we used to call Mona Mashi was a highly talented woman, and

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Bachu Bhai Shukla was a man of repute. He was the first director of All India Radio (AIR) when it was in Daryaganj, Delhi. He also taught Indira Gandhi when she was a student in Viswa Bharati, Santiniketan. Anjan Shukla, their son, also an internationally acknowledged scholar was a professor in Mathematical Philosophy in Hawaii University, USA. Later, he joined Viswa Bharati as a professor out of his own choice and died there when he was fairly young. His kid sister Gopa Shukla was also talented and was an artist trained in the JJ School of Arts, Bombay (she now lives in Poona). Born on November 30, 1938, Anjan Shukla was the only son of his parents, Bachu Bhai Shukla and Maitri. Like his parents, Anjan was schooled at Santiniketan, imbibing a taste and passion for literature. This was, in part, his inheritance too. Anjan's father was a notable person of Gujarati letters. On his mother's side, his grandfather, Mohini Mohan Senapti, was well-known for his atheistic writings in Oriya. Mohini Mohan's father, Fakir Mohan was acclaimed as a master of Oriya prose in his time. "As for Anjan, there are quite a few at Santiniketan who would recount enthusiastically his role as Raghupati in Tagore's 'Visarjan' (translated into English as 'Sacrifice'). In many ways, Raghupati surely had been an archetypal figure for Anjan," recalls Prabir Ray, his colleague in Santiniketan.

After a brief spell of teaching mathematics at Visva Bharati, Anjan Shukla got himself registered there as a Junior Research Fellow at the Centre for Advanced Study in Philosophy in 1964. In the same year, he submitted two papers which were accepted and published subsequently in the Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic (henceforth N.D.J.F.L.), volumes 6 (1965) and 7 (1966). Anjan brought his tenure of Fellowship to a sudden close when he left Visva Bharati in order to join the faculty of Mathematics at the University of Notre Dame du Lac

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as a Teaching Assistant. While in that position, he received his MS degree in Mathematics in 1966, and also his PhD in 1967. From 1968 to 1972, Anjan was Assistant Professor in Mathematics at the University of Hawaii. In the meantime, he obtained an MA degree in Philosophy, and was appointed to the Graduate Faculty in 1969. In the same year, he taught at the National Science Foundation in Japan.

Anjan returned to India in 1973, and joined the Department of Philosophy at the University of North Bengal as Visiting Fellow. Having spent a couple of months there, he returned to Visva Bharati as Senior Research Fellow, and held the position from 1973 to 1975.

In 1980 Anjan was Visiting Fellow at Jadavpur University, and in 1984 he was offered Visiting Professorship by the University of Calcutta. An excerpt from Pabitra Roy's article referred below-

> I had been a colleague of Anjan for over a decade, and shall for years to come cherish the memory of his virtues like humility and ego lessness. Preeminent a logician that he was, he never gave himself airs of superiority, and always cooperatively shared the task of giving lessons in Logic with other colleagues, who were, in so far as Logic was concerned, neither a match for, nor a patch on him. I deem it to be a rare academic virtue. Even though most of his colleagues were either largely ignorant of his achievements or smugly unconscious of his worth, yet Anjan did enjoy occupying a special niche in the hearts as well as the minds of his pupils. Along with many of his pupils, I fondly recollect how Anjan, while teaching Logic and related topics, used to proceed from one step to another, leaving almost nothing unexplained, and to handle difficult structures with grace, ease and clarity.
>
> Anjan has in the meantime submitted 10 papers that await publication. His published work has been widely noticed, reviewed, and cited by Prior, Cresswell, Pledger, Leberberg, Wronski, Zeman, Thomason and others.

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Not many people know that Anjan had a great admiration for Heidegger, and was a Zen enthusiast. Once I remember he took a student of his to task for not being thorough with Sartre's writings on literature.

Anjan lived all by himself in a house he bought in a village away from Visva Bharati campus, and used to cycle down for his classes. One of his students who was closest to him had asked him as to why he chose to live in such seclusion. Anjan pointed to the glorious sunset on the distant horizon and smiled. How could such loveliness be witnessed except in loneliness? Anjan not only meant the question intended, but also lived it.

'This man decided not to live but know' – so did I feel like saying when Anjan's death was told. With the death of Anjan Shukla, a logician of note and international repute is gone to wherever creative logicians go after death, leaving it to his admirers and critics to mourn his loss. The line from the Browning Poem should ring true to any one, if only one cared to know how he undertook his pilgrimage. He was, in the manner of his life, a living critique of the world of Kant, the great philosopher. Anjan Shukla detested hypocrisy and meanness that he saw around him. He was an embodiment of the longing for sincere, uncontaminated passion. To quote Pabitra Roy, "This man decided not to live but know" – so did I feel like saying when Anjan's death was announced". He further went on to say "with the death of Anjan Shukla, a logician of note and international repute is gone to wherever creative logicians go after death, leaving it to his admirers and critics to mourn his loss. The line from the Browning poem should ring true to anyone, if only one cared to know how Anjan went on his pilgrimage."

Pabitra Kumar Roy
Department of Philosophy,
University of North Bengal

I add here, that, the above was perhaps said in view of the fact that Anjan Shukla was found dead under mysterious circumstances in his home in Shantiniketan. In fact, his deceased body was discovered inside a cupboard. I simply shudder at the thought.

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CHAPTER 5
Mona Mashi

Maitri Shukla, fondly addressed by me as Mona Mashi, (my mother's real sister and Fakir Mohan Senapati's granddaughter) was very close to my mother, and I too, used to have intimate interactions with her. I was extremely fond of her and she had a great liking for me. So, it was complete mutual admiration. She was a writer, an artist, homoeopath, a fantastic cook and to top it all, a mine owner. What could be a headier combination than this? I think she comes closest to Fakir Mohan Senapati in terms of a multifaceted personality. Maitri Shukla translated Fakir Mohan Senapati's "Chhamana Atha Guntha" into Bengali. Her book won the Sahitya Akademi award and I feel proud of the fact that she stayed with me in Delhi when she came to receive the award, sometime in the 1970s. I have travelled the whole world by now and I can say that I have yet to meet a more interesting person than Mona Mashi. She was a medley of many things as stated earlier, and there might have been much more to her if her talents were nurtured a little more.

Now, when I rack my brain, I realise what a great story teller she was. She used to make frequent visits to the Bakhrabad house and I had the opportunity to be with her during bedtime and at other times as well. Inside the mosquito net, while lying by my side, she would narrate stories of her visits to the mining area (Barbil Mines) where, because of her unconventional ways of dressing up and manners in general, she was considered a

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witch by the locals. I cannot help myself narrating the story in greater detail. For me, as a wide-eyed child who listened to her spell-binding stories with rapt attention, it was bound to leave a lasting impression. Now, as a grandmother myself, I avail the opportunity of re-narrating those stories to my grandchildren living in the USA.

My older grandson is seven years of age. It was a revelation for me to know that my grandson being brought up in the Bay area of California with his newfangled gadgets and toys, robots and computers as company, R2D2, Minecraft, Star Wars and Disneyland spectacles to feed his young mind would still be fascinated by grandmother's old tales. Perhaps the true natural instincts of a human come to the fore on such occasions. Fortunately, the fact of human element evoking varied emotions still remains intact, even in the present times of mechanisation.

Now coming back to Mona Mashi's account of the incidents that she witnessed in the mining area. As a mine owner in Odisha, in particular in Barbil in Kendujhar district, she was looked upon as someone with supernatural powers for various reasons, apart from the fact her homeopathy medicines were able to cure diseases completely with one dose of the sweet pill. Many would perhaps not know that a high potency one dose can take care of longstanding ailments.

In fact, besides me, many in Cuttack would still vouch for Mona Mashi's skill at this. She was for long known as "Panikia doctor" (meaning the one dose doctor). Mona Mashi was widowed early. Her unconventional looks bordered on the weird and were heightened by the clothes that she wore, a lungi and a top. Such an outfit was unimaginable for a woman in the late 1950s. Coupled with this was her operating at the same level

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with men in handling mining matters, which baffled the locals (tribals) no end. They decided to find out whether she was human or superhuman. So, one day on the banks of a river, they set up a puja with a big earthen vessel marked with sindur (vermillion), coconuts, flowers and other things, and waited for her to walk that path. They were sure that if she is a human, she would die, if not, she would survive. Mona Mashi got a scent of all this and the specific arrangements that were being made and decided to show to them, in her characteristic nonchalant way, that she can walk down the path with no harm caused to her. So, she walked up to it and kicked the earthen pot hard with her heels. The locals, who were watching her from a distance, were amazed no end rushed to bow before her. Some even gingerly tried to touch her feet. Thereafter, many a time I found Mona Mashi dressed in a plain saffron colored saree. It never occurred to me that I should put two and two together. Now, when I think of it, I feel there might have been a link – the saffron saree and the acquired super human status.

She also used to narrate how she had big snakes sleeping above her on the top of the mosquito curtains in the mining area of Barbil. She said she never was disturbed by these sites during her stay in the interiors of the mining area and that she considered her sleep more important than bothering about creatures that are normally harmless. Memories such as these remain deeply entrenched in my mind even to this day. She was a highly interesting person and intrigued me no end. In short, she had a lot of impact on me.

Maitri Shukla was an outstanding lady, multifaceted and with fascinating idiosyncrasies as well. As a child I found it rather interesting to watch how the three sisters, Maitri, Maya and my mother Binapani used to have sisterly fights. They also had another sister named Meera who was the eldest of them all.

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She however died very young in a mishap. Mona Mashi was a highly erudite person and a litterateur of no mean order. She was a scholar, a homeopath, a printer, a mine owner, an excellent cook, an 'achar' (pickles) maker all rolled into one. She was very close to my mother, but at the same time they both had sisterly fights very often. It was interesting to watch their relationship. It was interesting for a kid of my age to observe how she would rush out of the house in a huff. But before that she would rush towards the door so as not to waste any time. Since she had elephantiasis in one foot, she had to struggle a bit to put on her slippers. In fact, she had got special sandals made for herself from Chinese shoe makers in Calcutta. So, one day the sisters would fight tooth and nail, then very abruptly Mona Mashi would put on her slippers in a huff and storm out of the house. The very next day, she would turn up with a tiffin carrier in hand with delicacies prepared by her to give it to her sister (my mother), and all this with a straight face.

Of the three, Maya was a quieter person. The other two were whimsical. They used to fight one day, and the next day they were best of buddies sharing homemade goodies with relish. Mona Mashi (Maitri Shukla) used to restore peace by getting delicacies for my mother. They appeared arch enemies one day and the next day my mother would melt away at the sight of the tiffin carrier that Mona Mashi entered the house with.

Recently I met Dr. Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharya, who was Director, NBT and was later Secretary, Sahitya Akademi and held many other coveted posts. We got chatting one day about Fakir Mohan Senapati's family. He then came out with some more facts about Mona Mashi, hitherto unknown to me.

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He said Maitri Shukla (Mona Mashi), despite being the daughter and granddaughter of luminaries, was unassuming to the core. He recalled how after Maitri Shukla had submitted her manuscript of the Bengali translation of "Chhaman Atha Guntha", he along with others, had vetted Mona Mashi's manuscript. She used to come to him to enquire about the time frame within which it was likely to be published. She used to travel all the way from Bhubaneswar to Calcutta time and again, and never lost her patience or her temper. Mr. Bhattacharya said that she also helped in the writing of the major works on Fakir Mohan Senapati and was very thorough in her work. When I was in Delhi Mona Mashi came to stay with me.

Long years passed and again I happened to meet Nirmal Kanti ji. What a coincidence! When I requested Mr. Bhattacharya to be the chief of the editorial board that I instituted for the compilation and other related matters concerning FM Senapati's works, he readily agreed. Now things are in place and work is in progress. The work is on with many litterateurs who are lending a helping hand. They include Professor Jatindra Kumar Nayak, Professor Debendra Dash, Dash Benhur, Asit Mohanty and Rabindra Das of Viswa Bharati University. While talking to me the other day he was reminiscing about the yesteryears and making fond remarks about Mona Mashi. "She was a perfectionist," he remarked, and I was quite happy to hear those good words about my aunt.

Mona mashi was ever on the move due to her multifarious activities. Her son, Professor Anjan Shukla, an intellectual of high order, was a Professor of Mathematical Philosophy in Hawaii University, USA. He later shifted to Santiniketan and, after a few years of teaching there, was found dead under mysterious circumstances locked inside a cupboard. He was suffering from schizophrenia. Much later, people and Mona

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Mashi herself gathered information that he had admitted a small girl in a school and had put his name in the space provided for father. Mona Mashi after Anjan Shukla's (whom we addressed as Pupu dada) death frequently visited Santiniketan to look after the girl and provide financial assistance to her. When Anjan Shukla was alive I wished so many times to see him. Unfortunately, it never worked out. Mona Mashi remained very upset for a long time. We used to get news about her off and on, but the news we got of her finally was highly disturbing. I often wished to meet her, but could not do so because we heard that she was kidnapped by some hooligans for they wanted to take away from her the manganese mines that she owned in Barbil. They, however, looked after her well and nursed her back to health when she was sick. We got reports that she was very happy there, and in fact enjoyed her stay there for she had never received so much care from any one before. However, as for this special treatment by the hooligans, the reason was obvious. She was at a very ripe old age where she was oblivious to their ulterior motives. This blissful state was, however, short-lived. The kidnappers took Mona Mashi's signature for transfer of the ownership of the manganese mines in their name. Soon after we got the news that Mona Mashi had passed away. I was pained no end to hear this news. It was as if a part of my world came crashing down for, she was one of my ideals. A lot of my thoughts were shaped by her intellectual influence. A chapter of my life, so to say, came to an end but the memories are fresh and intact.

The other day, in 2016, her daughter Gopa suddenly visited me in Delhi. We met after 25 years. I enquired after Mona Mashi's last days and was astonished to hear that she could not visit her mother because of the obvious reasons. She was totally debarred by the kidnappers from doing that. As for the property

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that Mona Mashi had in Bhubaneswar, somewhere near the railway station, was usurped by another group of hooligans. Gopa till date does not know where her mother's belongings went. Forget about her daughter's anguish, even I was pained no end, for I was close to Mona Mashi and knew all about her work, her paintings etc. If I correctly remember, apart from other paintings of hers, there was one that she did of her mother (my grandmother). I would like to have treasured that. Alas, if only the hooligans had handed over her personal belongings before they took the house away, but they did not. Such are the ways of this world!

Mona Mashi was an avid reader and had a special interest in homoeopathy. It was from her that I learnt about Hannemann, the father of homoeopathy who belongs to Germany. She had a whole almirah of those books and used to tell me 'I will these to you my dear Tota'. She was especially fond of me and had named me as 'Tota Pakhi'. She would, however, call me Tota. I was addressed as Pakhi by all in the Bakhrabad house, and people till this date in Cuttack, in intimate circles, know me as Pakhi and not Monica. Mona Mashi also had another name for me. It was 'Rajanigandha Pushpadanda' meaning tuberose. My other cousins felt a little jealous about Mona Mashi's special liking for me. Now of course we are grown-ups and a lot of water has flown down the Mahanadi, and we have all risen above all those trivial matters. But for me, all that attention from Mona Mashi, and the positive impact thereof, is what has contributed to the shaping of the person I am today. As they say, the first ten years of a child's life is extremely important, and all the impact that a child receives in this period goes into shaping him/her as an adult.

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CHAPTER 6

Kartika Purnima 'Boita Bhasana' and Other Memories

I have several fond memories of the Bakhrabad house. During the month of Kartika was celebrated this great festival of 'Boita Bondana' (floating of small paper boats, as well as boats made with large sized banana leaves in the river). All Odiyas till date observe it with great fervour. We cousins in the Bakhrabad house used to wake up early on that day, and under the supervision and guidance of the elders, mostly womenfolk of the house, prepared our little boats laden with fresh flowers, little lamps and wicks soaked in oil were readied to be floated on the Kathjodi river which flows nearby. That used to be an exciting occasion for us. Our excitement knew no bounds while waiting for this day to arrive. We all used to get together and head for the river with one or two adults accompanying us. Later, when we grew a little older, it was our female attendants (female ayahs) who would accompany us. Didima, of all the members of the house, took a lot of interest in this and made sure we kids had a good time. My mother, Binapani, also made it a point that we observed it more for the fun of it than anything else. Later in the day, we were taken to the Balijatra Mela where we enjoyed all the special goodies sold there. I remember the giant sized puris, delicious dahi vadas and sweet meats. My mother used to always make sure that I had my friends and cousins tag along with me. When I look back at the religious

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manner in which I was dropped every single day at the big house, it was not really out of sheer self-interest, but for some other reason. Since I was the only child, she made sure I grew up with children of my age and in the safe confines of my grandmother's house in the company of my cousin brothers and sisters.

Bakhrabad house was quite close to the river Kathjodi. In fact, my parents' house was just on the banks of the river. I remember how, with the help of a streak of adventure in me, I led a few times a team of 7-10-year olds to cross the river bed and go over to the other side of the river. The river used to be mostly dry, with only very shallow criss- crossing streams, that could be seen on the entire expanse of the river bed. Of course, there was always the risk of an over- powering spate that could happen anytime.

Daredevils that we were, we would've explored further but the people we met there, in a very paternal fashion, told us to go back to our homes before it got dark. They were amused at our boldness, but were also concerned about our safety. How safe and wonderful those days were! I wonder what would have been our fate if we had engaged in such an adventure in the present times. Mostly girl children were there in the group. Anyway, after returning home, there was a tirade of abuses that descended on us. We were reprimanded, and I was pinpointed as the major culprit and was labelled as the 'ring leader'. Does it ring some bells? Does it appear as a legacy passed on to me? For many, it definitely would, I suppose.

During my childhood days that were spent with my grandma in the Bakhrabad house, we had dance and music teachers coming to teach us. We had Khitish Maitra, an eminent vocal artist visiting our house for imparting lessons. Rakhal sir, another big name, also used to teach me music. They all used to come to the Bakhrabad house not as strangers; they used to

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enjoy the hospitality of the members of the household, especially my grandma and aunts. My mother was the cerebral kind – so she used to have intellectual discussions with the visitors. Khitish Maitra, whom musical circles of Cuttack remember till this date, was a true artist. He used to travel riding a bicycle and sing alaaps and taans in different classical raagas while cycling. The story does the rounds that Maitra sir often used to fall into ditches while cycling, so engrossed was he with his singing.

There was also Maiti Sir, the dance master. Those days Odissi dance was mostly the preserve of boys (gotipuas). Girls rarely were encouraged to take up dancing only as a hobby. Bakhrabad house, known as the house of aristocrats, had to have cultural moorings – so Maiti sir was appointed as the dance teacher for us kids. The day he used to visit, the servants had standing instructions to remove the huge sofa sets to one side in order to make room for dance lessons. The floor used to be a sprawling polished red floor and Maiti sir used to instruct us to dance to the beats. He would ask us to dance as we please. It was a free for all. That was the fun part for us.

We kids used to move all over the floor mostly by dragging our feet. My mother one day noticed the faux pas in the method of instruction. So, she shifted me to Kala Vikas Kendra and put me under the tutelage of Kelucharan Mohapatra, the doyen of Odissi dance. I used to come back to my cousins and demonstrate more structured poses. Soon I took upon me the directorship of a home staged drama. I used to gather all the children from the neighborhood, and practice sessions were held and finally, the staging of the drama, where my grandma and aunt were the chief guests, took place. A few people came from outside as well.

We kids at times used to stage our own plays and perform dance and music after erecting an improvised stage for the same.

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We hung bedsheets and old sarees to serve as curtains which were pulled by hand. For days on end, great preparations went behind the staging of the show. Our audience mainly constituted family members, some neighbours and a couple of invited guests. Again, I used to be the leader, and my youngest cousin used to be my most devoted apprentice. We also included some kid friends from the neighborhood but they were given only minor roles. One has a good laugh at these little things now.

For some time, we refrained from these activities, and as we were growing up, we graduated to other pastimes like playing carom and Chinese checkers.

The Kathjodi was very close to the Fakir Mohan house in Bakhrabad. We often used to go there to watch the river in its different forms. During the peak of summer, it used to be dry with few streams criss-crossing the river bed. In the monsoon months, it used to swell and threatened to overflow its banks. During the summer months we would collect pebbles of different shapes and sizes, and dress them up like dolls with pieces of cloth and paint eyes and noses for full effect. I used to preserve that in the side wall almirah in the drawing room of the Bakhrabad house. Above the wall almirahs on both sides hung pictures of Fakir Mohan Senapati (original one), Mohini Mohan Senapati and some others about whom I never bothered to know.

These pictures hung just above the almirah housing my dolls. I felt so secure that there were big people keeping a close watch over my dolls. How little did I know then that these people were not just notionally big, but were really big in the truest sense of the term?

I often wondered how nice it would have been if they were around, and recreated scenes around them in my mind in many of my reflective moods, sitting on the drawing room couch. The

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huge drawing room was a place in which most members of the house often used to be seen. It had, in fact it still has, sofas and couches which were made during the British days that had the unmistakable English touch about them. There were low couches and sofas with heavy frills and expensive wooden frames. Besides, there were two tall black wooden statues that seemed like Chinese men. There were many teapots and artifacts and collectibles around the house. There was a radio on one side and two antique wooden almirahs with small sections of glass fitted in front for facilitating a view of the various curios and collectibles that were kept inside. Perhaps it still has the Saraswati Samman that Fakir Mohan Senapati had received from the Raja of Bamada. As a child, my favorite pastime was to peep into the almirah and closely observe the collectibles that were there. I was forbidden by grandma and my aunt not to open the almirahs and they were kept locked at all times.

There was also a grandfather clock of a moderate size which used to very loudly announce the passing of hours in a majestic way. The swing of the golden pendulum for me held immense interest. Maybe this has left an indelible impression upon my mind, and to this day I always have a big clock in my house to show the time. My son, who is in the USA, feels highly amused when I insist on having a big wall clock. Perhaps it seems so incongruous to them in this digital era. He tried to get me used to watching the time in the microwave oven and the other different gadgets around the house. But he failed miserably since I persisted with my choice and finally did carry my big wall clock to California all the way from India. I use it in my room there.

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CHAPTER 7

The Layout of the Bakhrabad House

The premises of the Bakhrabad house occupied about one acre of land. Different varieties of trees were planted here in a somewhat unplanned manner. This perhaps added to the enchantment of the house by lending it a touch of wildness. In the backyard grew mostly fruiting trees – coconut trees, guava trees, mango trees and different kinds of berry trees. The bedrooms overlooked the backyard. All kinds of vegetable plants grew in the backyard along with a wood apple (bel) tree in one corner. It also had a toilet meant for the servants at some distance from the house. On the other side of the house, considered for all practical purposes the front portion, there was a huge verandah that overlooked this portion of the garden. The garden had a wide variety of decorative and exotic plants. In one corner of the garden was a well. In fact, one can term it as the legendary well because this is the well into which Biju Patnaik had once fallen. During one of his visits to the Bakhrabad house, he had fallen into the above mentioned well. Towards the middle of the garden was a huge 'jamrul' tree. Jamrul has become a very rare fruit now. This tree was planted by Fakir Mohan Senapati himself, and has grown very tall since. As children we used to perch on its branches at different levels, sometimes in a reclining position, and we used to chit-chat with each other until we were summoned by our elders into the

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house. This tree and its fruits always held a special fascination for me, so much so that even to this day whenever I spot someone selling jamrul fruit, I make it a point to buy a few, and admire it before having it.

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CHAPTER 8
Toilets in Bakhrabad House

I cannot resist dwelling on the toilet system that was in existence those days. Kids in our time know little or nothing about it. Come to think of it, it could now involve a 'human rights case'.

The toilet was on a very high pedestal and a flight of steps led to it. There were three big holes, and two-foot stands to facilitate squatting. The excreta used to drop on the cemented ground below. It was a free fall. Now comes the most horrendous part. The scavengers came at an appointed time to collect all the excreta in big tin cans, which they used to place on their heads and walk down the narrow 'gullies' (lanes), to dump it God knows where. The tins mostly were full up to the brim, because the excreta collected was not from a single house but from several houses. I remember that these scavengers were mostly women, and the tins were not covered. So, if one walked the street by chance along with them you can imagine what an experience one would have. Those days one never thought deeply about these things, but when one thinks of them now one would feel like throwing up. What hell could be worse than this? Thank God, the system does not exist anymore. The septic toilets have done a world of good to humanity. But despite that, a lot remains to be done even now. The sanitation and garbage problem have acquired menacing dimensions today. With very young children sorting things out from garbage heaps for a living, one wonders if those days of manual scavenging are

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really over. Can't we put a civilized way of garbage disposal in place soon? I feel very strongly about these things and tried to do whatever I could here and there. Once under the auspices of FMF I joined hands with ROW 'Rivers of the World', Mary land, USA and did some work at the Daya river near Bhubaneswar. We sensitised the people around the areato the hazards of open defecation and urged them to install in their homes 'Sulabh Sauchalays' (low cost toilets). Even at the place where we live today, considered a posh area in Faridabad, garbage dumping including forensic waste dumping still takes place. I tried doing something about it, took photos, reported the matter to the authorities concerned. The dumping did stop for some time, and again things were back to square one. A whole new system has to be established. Piecemeal, individual efforts, will never deliver the good. I, personally, am of the belief that individual charity seldom brings about meaningful change at the macro level.

The bathroom in the Bakhrabad house was nice and big with a huge cemented open tub where water was stored for us kids. There was a well in the courtyard as well. Our house attendants used to draw water from the well and pour it on us kids who lined up before him, emptying the bucket on our heads. The cool fresh water bath taken in the open was sheer delight. We cousins had two attendants to draw water from the well for our bath, and we had two ayahs (woman attendants) to wipe us dry. This was followed by lunch and then a nap. Study time would be followed by bedtime stories told by Didima or Mona Mashi during her occasional visits.

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CHAPTER 9

Maya Dutta

My younger aunt Maya (we used to call her Khuku Mashi) was a quiet woman, and was always engaged in some chore or the other throughout the day. She was widowed early, and hence the task of taking care of her four kids fell on her shoulders entirely. She also looked after me. During Christmas time, she played the role of Santa Claus. For many years she made us believe that Santa Claus came down the chimney into the bedroom, carrying gifts for all children, and special gifts for children who are really good. So, we were made go to bed early on the large bed which used to accommodate at least three of us. We lay happily under warm blankets and the mosquito net tucked in safely. Early in the morning, even before the sun was up, we kids turned up the pillows to find what Santa Claus has left for us. Walnuts with shells intact were always included in the gifts.

Those days walnut was a rarity, but we received decent quantity of it during Christmas year after year, thinking that perhaps Santa was especially fond of walnuts. Much later we got to know that Santa was none other than our dear Khuku Mashi. She had dropped out of medical school, and was a good 'esraj' player. This musical instrument one rarely hears about these days. My mother too, apart from being a good singer, also tried her hand at playing Esraj. Khuku Mashi's husband, our Mesho, was Dr. Jagdish Dutta. He was the chief physician at the Cuttack Medical College. He was quite renowned, was handsome, and

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had many hobbies. I have faint recollections of him. Once when the Kathjodi was in a spate, during pre-monsoon months, there was news that quite a few large sized crocodiles have been sighted in the river. Jagdish Mesho took out his rifle and shot one of the crocodiles. That was an exciting spectacle for us, and Mesho became a hero in the eyes of the onlookers who were assembled there. He died young in a road accident. I remember walking along with his funeral procession for a few yards. His youngest daughter called Bulai, who was hardly three years old, walked by my side. I was around seven at that time.

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CHAPTER 10
Meera Mashi

Meera was the eldest of my aunts. I did not see her as she died much before my mother got married. People knew that she was much loved by Fakir Mohan Senapati, and a photo of Fakir Mohan Senapati and Meera by his side is still available. I too possess other photos of hers with my mother and aunts. She was a very dignified, yet humble sort of person. Her qualities of the heart exceeded those of the head, and she was loved by everyone. In those days, when she was also a school teacher, she used to go to the Brahmani river to take her bath, in the evening after school hours. Her maid would accompany her to the banks of the river, a lantern in hand. My mother told me that one day the maid came back home howling and said that as Meera Mashi descended the steps leading down to the river and put her feet into the water, a crocodile dragged her inside and no trace of her was found. This is a tragic incident which keeps haunting me.

Niraj Mohan and Adhiraj Mohan Senapati used to live nearby. They used to drop in at the Bakhrabad house sometimes. They resembled FM Senapati to some extent. We still have another one in the family who resembles FM Senapati. I have discovered some other members of the Senapati clan recently. Since we were the direct descendants of Senapati, we confined ourselves only to the close circle of Mohini Mohan's children and grandchildren who are FM Senapati's great grandchildren.

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Slightly distant was the family of Laxmikant Chowdhary, who's most outstanding daughter was Snehamayi Mahapatra (née Chaudhary). We knew her as Budhi didi. She was breathtakingly beautiful, and was an erudite person and an excellent singer. She was closely associated with the Ram Krishna Mission. I have childhood recollections of her. Actually, I had spent a lot of time at her place. My parents, especially my mother, used to frequently visit her. I remember how they used to discuss books and other important topics for hours on end. I used to spend time listening to adult talk, and sometimes playing with Sanju, Runu and Pinaki who were Budhi didi's children. Budhi displayed a rare kind of versatility. She was an extremely cheerful and well – informed person, was also proficient in languages and a singer of high order. Along with all this she was very affable person. She was beauty with brains, and was my favorite. Had she been living now, she would have been chased by men. She always used to have kind words for me and would say, 'Never give up singing, Pakhi (my nick name)'. In fact, perhaps these words and my father's encouragement and support led me to seriously take up training in classical music.

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CHAPTER 11
About Myself

I was basically a small-town girl from Bhubaneswar, Odisha. I did my schooling in St. Joseph's Convent in Cuttack and then in Bhubaneswar. My mother served as headmistress in Capital Girls High School, Bhubaneswar. She was suddenly transferred to Balasore as the headmistress of Barabati Girls High School. What an irony of fate! Again, it reminds me of the pattern woven by fate for me. It is uncanny. I was again thrown into the midst of the grand design surrounding Fakir Mohan. So, I got to stay in the same house that Fakir Mohan had built near Shanti Kanan in Balasore. I was enrolled at Barabati Girl's High School and I passed the matriculation examination from there. The school building housed Bagha Jatin's memorial. The compound had many Portuguese monuments. I lived with my parents in the bungalow allotted to my mother who was the headmistress. There we stayed for a period of ten years. The school had a girls' hostel. So, I had a lot of company. We all used to sit around a big neem tree in the evening and sing songs and exchange notes on various topics. I was among the very few who cycled and also played with the neighborhood boys, climbed trees and roof tops, explored the neighborhood to our hearts' content, played badminton, joined NCC, attended camps held in the Charbatia area of Cuttack. My mother, an extremely progressive woman, was intent on giving me a holistic exposure to life.

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Perhaps this, and my father's encouragement and support that led me to seriously take up training in classical music. Subsequently I become an 'All India Radio' singer. Then I was trained in classical music and Odissi by Sri Kashi Nath, Puja Panda, eminent Odissi vocal maestro. I then sang for long 8 years in Cuttack, and in Delhi later for 10 years. I had the great good fortune of having my songs been given the tunes by none other than the great maestro Bhubaneswar Mishra. I had many sittings with Sunakar Sahu, another great instrumentalist. Much later when I was in Delhi I was trained in classical music and ghazal singing by Zahur Ahmed Khan who was producer in AIR in Delhi. Another fact which I cite here with pride is that when I was a vocal artiste at Air Cuttack during the 60s, the great Hari Prasad Chaurasia was a staff artiste. So, I had the good fortune of having him as an accompanist for my songs. Though some people might find hard to believe but that is for a fact. Now of course I am a nobody in the music world. That is a separate thing. The other day I met Shri Chaurasia on the occasion of his book launch with Penguin publishers. I was an invited guest there for I too have a book published by the same publishers. I mustered enough courage to walk up to him (Hari Prasad Chaurasia) after the event and greeted him with folded hands. He greeted back. Contrary to what I had imagined, he appeared a very humble person and reminisced about days when he was a staff artiste at Air Cuttack. This is what great art does to people. It helps to breed humility and graciousness.

I never thought of things in such terms then. Now, in retrospect, things fall into place. All this perhaps went to plant the seed of free thinking in one. I started realising that I had to come out of my cocoon and explore the world outside. In the natural course of things, I found myself a little more outgoing than I was earlier. However, I was shy, somewhat timid and

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shunned male company, but over the years I changed my attitude, and in my professional dealings with men I interacted with them on an equal footing. All the same, I took care to choose only the very evolved and outstanding men – men of caliber. I was snooty in that sense. Interacting with men helped me to acquire a balanced outlook on life. I started thinking deeply about the gender balance that is needed badly in our society. I wrote several papers on gender issues which helped me to shed some of my inhibitions gradually. However, till this date, I have not been able to shed it completely for I was always brought up in an atmosphere where feminine grace, dignity and decorum were given a premium. I was proud of the fact that I was a woman and guarded my dignity zealously.

While I was teaching in Gargi College an affiliated college of Delhi University, I learnt a lot. Teaching was a learning experience for me, and that perhaps prompted me to go beyond the limiting boundaries of my existing situation. After 30 years of teaching I started growing a little restless. An overpowering urge to free myself from the shackles fettering me made me feel restless. Some of my close friends encouraged me to break free, and one of them even said, "Dear, you have nothing to lose but your chains". Chains perhaps are too strong a word, for my teaching career gave me the opportunity to be moulded into a well-groomed person, and perhaps removed some angularities in me. I am grateful for all that. However, there was something that kept nagging me for some time. I have been toying with the idea of setting up a foundation in the name of Fakir Mohan Senapati. I wished to carry forward his legacy that would serve a purpose in society. I hoped that at least through this I could pay a tribute to this towering personality.

I take here the liberty of digressing a bit and looking back over the years. I came to Delhi at the age of 22 and got a

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lecturer's job in Kamala Nehru College (those days, it was housed in a building in Defence Colony and was called Modern College), I fondly recollect about one big milestone in my life. It was about my first job interview at Delhi School of Economics. I had put in my application for a job in Delhi University as lecturer in Economics. I got an extremely short notice to go and meet Professor Naqvi who was then, the head of the department in Delhi School, Economics. Despite the fact that my father had accompanied me, I felt a bit nervous and really did not hope to be successful at the interview for the specific reason that just the previous hour I was roaming in Karol Bagh with my father and having a good time at the roadside snack bars eating Chhole bhature. Suddenly, I was summoned to answer questions on the indifference curve, then the theory of consumer surplus, Schumpeter's theory of Capitalism, and so on. I did answer some of the questions correctly, however, it must have been divine grace to have got a nod from him. I still fondly recall how he told my father that even though I could answer only some of the questions posed to me, he could still see that I had all the potential for being a good teacher and this was my stepping stone to Delhi. Soon I got my first appointment letter. My joy knew no bounds.

Years passed by, I got married, had my kids. I got engrossed with my profession as a lecturer in Economics in Delhi University. I strived to make a mark in my career. I had strong extracurricular interests like dance, drama, music and writing which I nurtured to some extent, but there too did not go full throttle – I always did the balancing act so as not to neglect my household, my husband and children, and that was certainly a tall order. But once my children who were extremely bright boys were poised to take off in life with their degrees from prestigious institutions like IITs, UT Austin and the

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Business school of Wharton, Philadelphia, USA I started thinking out of the box.

I thought to myself, 'The time has perhaps arrived for me to take things forward. Perhaps it was all pre-ordained that I get back into the FM Senapati mode. started reading the Fakir Mohan 'Granthabali', presented to me by my mother, which she had perhaps procured from my grandmother from the Bakhrabad house. Now, looking back, I think had it not been in my possession lying right in front of me then, I would not perhaps have made an attempt to read it. This perhaps is the Almighty's wish and my mother's blessings. Soon thoughts started nesting in my mind and I seriously got down to researching on Fakir Mohan. Fortunately enough, I could lay my hands on the history of Indian literature written by Professor Sisir Das. It is published in three volumes by Sahitya Akademy. It fascinated me a lot, and I ended up spending months at the Mandi House library (Rabindra Bhawan) going through this. I give below an excerpt from what the pre-eminent Professor, Sisir Das has written on Fakir Mohan Senapati in one of the volumes:

> "Oriya literature felt a new impulse with the emergence of the three writers at the same time: Fakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918), Radhanath Ray (1848-1908), and Madhusudan Rao (1853-1918). However, Fakir Mohan, considered to be the father of Oriya literature, was the Oriya novelist who dominated the Oriya literary scene till his death in 1918. There was no towering personality like Fakir Mohan, Harinarayan Apte or Govardhanram either in Tamil or in Kannad literature during the period. The greatest work of Fakir Mohan 'Chaman Athaguntha' (1902), is not only free from all traces of Bankim tradition, but it created a new world of fiction which was further expanded and enriched later in the century by several writers, particularly Premchand, Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, Takazhi Shivasankar Pillai, Pannala Patel, Gopinath Mohanty, all master-chroniclers of social transformation.

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> The remarkable quality of work is its stark realism and grim humour, and an abundant sympathy for the poor and the downtrodden. It is a story of an unscrupulous landlord and his greed for acquiring more and more land, told in the language of the common man. It centers round the machination of the landlord to grab a piece of land measuring six acres and thirty-two decimals, (Chamana Athaguntha), belonging to a poor weaver Bhagai and his childless wife Saria.
>
> A few years earlier, Rabindranath Tagore, himself a landlord, had written a poem 'Two Bighas of Land' (1895-96) on a similar theme. A tender and touching poem it certainly was, but Fakir Mohan went far ahead in depicting the suffering of the poor, groaning under a socio-economic system that involved absentee landlordism, the intriguing rent controllers manipulating to become owners of estates, the nefarious activities of the police, the heartlessness of the court and the simple daily lives of villagers. The novel is indeed, a remarkable human document of rural India.
>
> Fakir Mohan is probably the first Indian to write a short story in the modern sense. His first short story 'Lachama', published in 1901 deals with the Maratha invasion of Orissa. Apart from a close resemblance with Bankim's technique, the moving theme and the character of a heroic woman in 'Lachama' made an immediate impact upon the reading public."
>
> Das, Sisir Kumar. A History of Indian Literature: Vol. VIII 1800-1910: Western Impact: Indian Response. New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 1991.

Professor Sisir Das in his "History of India Literature" showed FM in very good light and has convincingly established that Fakir Mohan Senapati was a pioneering novelist and a leading light of Indian literature, which predates Munshi Premchand and Rabindranath Tagore. I still remember an interview with him in the course of the making of my film "*Anvesan*" on the life and works of Fakir Mohan Senapati (This film is now available with the Prasar Bharti archives, New Delhi).

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CHAPTER 12

About the Great Famine

I also read and later reflected on the great famine 'Naanka Durbhiksha' that happened in Odisha. As a student of the social sciences, this cataclysmic event aroused my attention. Besides, the account given by Fakir Mohan Senapati of the famine was so vivid that one almost relives it. I give below the account and also my feelings regarding the tragedy which revealed to me that it was a calamity which could have been averted if things were managed properly. This is what set me thinking. The worst thing that could happen to human beings is the non-availability of the source of sustenance. It is unthinkable that people have to all of a sudden go without food and nutrition and that too for days on end. This can be best described as 'famine.' The very name conjures up images of utter misery and devastation. The problem gets compounded when it becomes so widespread that it takes a toll on people's lives on a massive scale.

Looking at world history, one comes across such deprivation that had caused death to millions. It is hard to believe that even in the not so distant past, i.e. in the 20th century, there were famines which created utter havoc and humans perished in large numbers. Famines can be seen as the dance of death.

It is astounding that famines are caused not just by natural disasters, but often by mismanagement and wrong policy

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decisions of the government or those who are supposed to be the proverbial 'custodians' of the welfare of its people. What could be more unfortunate? The worst hit is obviously the less privileged or underdogs of society, who constitute the majority of the population. The above stated facts are corroborated by recorded history.

The great famine in China in 1958-62 was the result of Mao-Zedong's Great Leap Forward. China's leaders were oblivious of the severity of the famine and between 1958-61 doubled the grain exports and cut imports. Ten to thirty million perished for lack of food. Earlier on, the famine of China (Henan) in 1943 was caused by the Japanese invasion and grain seizure by the Chinese army to feed its troops and finance the war. In the Soviet Union (1921-22) approximately 9 million people died when massive crop failures due to drought were ignored by Vladimir Lenin. It responded only after the disaster had taken place and had ruined people's lives. Almost the same was the case in the Soviet Union in 1932-34 under Joseph Stalin's industrialisation programme. The dictatorial state even punished people who reported the famine, thereby adding insult to injury.

In North Korea, in 1995-99, 2 to 3 million people died. The cause of the famine was for reasons of flooding and faulty government policy. It was a combined effect of both that did the damage. In Cambodia, in 1979, approximately 2 million people died of starvation. These are only to cite some cases. There have been many more cases, in the 20th century.

Now if we look back a little further, we can cite cases from the 19th century from all over the world: England, Ireland, France and of course India. As for famines in India in the 18th, 19th and 20th century, history has recorded 60 million deaths.

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Talking of famines in India during British rule between 1765-1947, in some regions, famines were of such severe nature that one could be horrified even at the mere description of it. One can imagine how it would have been for people living or should one say dying in the midst of such a calamity.

I wish to share a vivid picture of famine:

"On the city streets
Roam strange creatures
Human like, yet not quite human
Cruel caricatures of humanity!
Yet they move and speak,
Like debris they pile up on the road
Sit foraging food, on piles of garbage weary
Crying out for 'Phyan' (water that is drained out from cooked rice.)"

(Premendra Mitra on the Bengal Famine 1943-44)

I may mention some major famines that devastated India: The Great Bengal Famine of 1769-70 where 1 million people died which was one third of the total population; another terrible famine happened in 1943. Famines ravaged many places in India, including Delhi, Western Ghats, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Kashmir (1783-84). Large areas were depopulated as a result.

Now coming to the home terrain, our very own Odisha, a severe famine devastated it in 1865-67. One million people died in the province. The Odisha famine of 1866 affected the east coast of India from Madras upwards, an area covering 180000 miles and home to a population of 47,500,000; the impact of the famine, however, was the greatest in Odisha, which at that time was quite isolated from the rest of India. In Odisha, one-third of the population died due to this famine. It was called the 'Naanka Durbhiksha,' and it was a tragedy of epic dimensions. A lucid description of this given by Fakir Mohan Senapati,

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which shocks the reader and leaves him stunned. Strange and at the same time utterly depressing is the fact that parts of the state of Odisha are vulnerable to famines even now.

Calamities strike to make life unbearable but when calamities crop up due to human neglect, it is a case of humans inflicting pain on fellow humans, and that is the problem that one should address. Here comes the question of providing food security which even today remains a crying need.

In view of the above, one would like to cite an interesting instance from the present times. As I write this, all over India people are facing a similar situation where both the rich and the poor are not able to buy food because of the removal of a certain denomination of legal tender (Rs 500 and Rs 1000 currency notes) and closure of banks. In short, the policy of demonetisation adopted by the government on the 9th of November 1916. People just did not have the money to buy food – fruits, vegetables, etc. This policy announced by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been backed by the good intention of cracking down on black money. Nevertheless, its fallout created a famine-like situation, be it for a day or two.

The idea here is to drive home the point that going by historical facts, famines or famine-like situations are mostly outcomes of policies – right or wrong, laid down by the government. In this case of the current situation (November 2016), there is a strong, divided opinion about the efficacy of the policy of demonetisation vis-à-vis the hardships faced by people in terms of financial security and the ensuing food security.

Coming back to the topic of 'Naanka Durbhiksha,' Fakir Mohan gives a graphic description of the great famine of Odisha in his 'Atma Jibana Charita' (autobiography).

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It was the year 1866 – the ninth regnal year of the king of Odisha and hence the name 'Naanka.' I quote here John Boulton from his translation of Fakir Mohan Senapati's Atma-Jeevana Carita titled 'My Life and Times' – the horror of it still lurks in people's minds. One could perhaps draw a parallel with the great worldwide depression of the 1930s. There Keynes at least could afford a solution and a simple solution at that – that is "ask people to dig holes and fill them up." In both the situations, it was the absence of the means to appease hunger. The difference between the two situations, however, was, one was manmade, and the other was seemingly a natural calamity. "Though Odisha's history, however, hints at human negligence that created the famine" (John Boulton, SOAS London).

"Three million people died, and almost a third of the population was wiped out. Those who survived the trauma were scattered away hither and thither", says Fakir Mohan who was a twenty-three-year-old lad then, teaching at a school. He recounts his close association with Reverend Hallam who had shown great kindness for him, perhaps for the reason that he had found in Fakir Mohan, a person of his choice with whom he could discuss literature. Due to this close association, Fakir Mohan could get an insight into the goings on and strategic moves of the British officers during those days.

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CHAPTER 13

Fakir Mohan Writes

"In August, there were good rains lasting about 4-5 days. Then come mid-September, people had to gaze at the skies looking for any signs of a down pour. Rain became the sole topic of conversation. The crops were perishing and paddy was worst hit for obvious reasons. Rice being the staple diet, people were driven to despondency. The crop had shriveled and become straw like, only left for the cattle to graze on it but strangely enough the cattle also refused to touch it."

Labourers sold their valuables, then brass pots and struggled to pull on for some time. Thereafter, they were left with no other option other than to take to the roads. Families got split – wives from husbands, brothers from brothers and sons and daughters from fathers. They turned to begging and went from door to door. Oxen and cows were sold off in exchange for rice. There were no scales to measure gold and silver what to speak of weighing rice and grains.

The famine was rather protracted. No help was in sight and by mid-February, the situation became so acute that people, artisans, peasants were scattered and thrown in different directions. They could not find anything that they could lay their hands on. When tender leaves came out in some trees, people swarmed up like monkeys, ten to twenty in a tree to pick and feed on those leaves. People were just skin and bones and

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roaming the streets with despair written large on their faces. Women were in rags and their breasts were just two flaps of loose skin hanging from their chests and children had their lips glued to those two dry flaps.

Children appeared only as a semblance of life. Death rate mounted and wherever one looked one saw corpses, whether it was on the river ghats, the woods or the roads it was like the dance of death all around. Now, one shudders even to imagine those scenes. How very horrifying, how very unfortunate that such a fate befalls humanity.

Mr. T.E Ravenshaw, Odisha's great friend and benefactor in whose name the prestigious Ravenshaw College and now Ravenshaw University has been established was at that time freshly appointed commissioner. He received a communication from the government that there was a likelihood of a famine breaking out in Odisha, and the commissioner should find out about the possible safeguards to deal with it in case of an.

He consulted the clerks known us 'shirastidars' who informed the commissioner that there was no need for concern and Ravenshaw's fears were allayed. He confidently reported back that there might only be a shortfall but no major crisis, since grains in sufficient quantities were in store to tide over an emergency situation. However, this was a grave mistake on the part of the commissioner. Before reporting to the government, he ought to have undertaken a thorough inquiry. What ensued was a major calamity 'ordained by providence' in Fakir Mohan's words.

Rice sold at rupee one, for ten seers and yet people could not afford it. It reminds us of the great worldwide depression of the 1930s. It was a case of too little money chasing too few

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goods. By March or April, the commissioner informed the government of the true state of affairs.

Fakir Mohan writes, "The present Calcutta trunk road was then a mere dirt track trailing through jungles infested with thieves and dacoits. Sending rice and paddy overland was out the question. Rice was somehow dispatched from Bengal and Rangoon in huge vessels and relief was offered." The government of British India imported grains and redeemed the situation somewhat.

As soon as news about relief spread to the rural areas, hunger-stricken populace started rushing to the relief centers to gorge themselves on rice. The result was they died of dysentery and cholera. Loads of dead and sunken and shriveled up bodies were taken on carts, and the sweepers tipped them into the river. Fakir Mohan Senapati says, "For a month to six weeks, I saw sweepers take three or four cart loads to the river each day."

As all things come to an end, the famine also ended. However, there were adults and children wandering on the streets. They were abandoned by the Hindu society for having eaten at the relief centers. What can be more inhuman than this one wonders? However, the Christian missionaries lovingly embraced the abandoned and the destitute. The least that one could do is to extol this extraordinary act of kindness. They not only provided them succour but imparted education and training to them. This act should be extolled with the highest of praises.

Another positive thing happened. T.E. Ravenshaw, who felt guilty about his negligence, wished to make amends for his inaction during the famine. For this, he tried to put in place a sound education system in Odisha. With the proactive initiatives

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taken by T.E. Ravenshaw emerged a well thought-out and organised system of education in Odisha.

Along with that the emergence of a nationalist intelligentsia, which can be traced back to the 1860s, served to awaken Indians about the adverse effect that the British rule was having on India. Coupled with that was the Utkala Deepika (a weekly) which played an instrumental role in awakening people's awareness of the prevailing situation. Here, Fakir Mohan played a major role apart from others like Gourishankar Ray.

It is interesting to note in this context the trajectory a course of events can take. Another revelation for me was how Naanka Durbhiksha, a terrible tragedy, triggered dynamic changes in society. The Naanka Durbhiksha of Odisha started with impoverishment and empty bellies and ended up in people's rise and awakening. Food security was restored, and a sound system of education was put in place. The credit for this has been given to T.E. Ravenshaw.

What is most striking about this famine was that it was an occurrence which imperiled human survival and devastated the human spirit, led to a sequence of events that uplifted the human soul, enlightened minds and created awareness through education and knowledge.

Fakir Mohan Senapati's account of Odisha's Naanka Durbhiksha helps to draw attention to facts of cruelty, depravity and utter loss of humanity that were observed during the famine. It records these for the benefit of posterity. This for sure helps us to view things in a proper perspective. In order that such calamities do not recur it is imperative that we take steps in the right direction, and at the right time.

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CHAPTER 14

Took the Plunge – Formed the Foundation

One fine day, I took the plunge and resigned from my job. I had seven years to go, and I took voluntary retirement. Some friends of mine were aghast. They said, "Monica dear, nobody in her senses does that. Why do you want to leave such a prestigious and a well-paid job? What has come over you?" To this, I replied, "I have earned my bread and butter for long 35 years, now I wish to liberate my soul". Thus, the foundation (FMF) was born. I started working day and night and set out to establish it in right earnest. My two boys were growing up then. They were almost half way through to being on their own. My husband was reluctant to give the nod in the beginning but later turned out to be supportive of whatever I was doing. My friends also encouraged me. Some even pushed me to go all the way and do what it takes to chase my dreams. It was an uphill task. But by God's grace, bit by bit, things picked up. The first person I should be thankful to is our legal advisor/expert, Mr. SC Nanda.

There were eminent people who readily agreed to be associated with the foundation. Their moral support and encouragement have provided me with the initial boost that is required to set up an organisation, in this case, a Trust.

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These pre-eminent people are none other than Mr. Lalit Mansingh, former ambassador to the US, Pratitabha Ray, Jnananpith award winner, Amarendra Khatua, former Indian ambassador to Argentina, who also retired recently as chairman ICCR. Besides, many professors from University of Delhi and Jamia Millia Islamia University, activists and eminent artists supported me. I also offer my profound gratitude to Dr. K.K Panda, who was the registrar, University of Delhi. He has been highly appreciative of the initiatives taken by me so far as FMF is concerned. I realised how a strong word of encouragement can take things far. Pratibha Ray has been my mentor and ideal throughout. Even her passive support acted like the source of succour for me always. We very often used to talk on the telephone, and that was enough inspiration for me. Even when I penned my book on the girl child, which came to be published by Penguin Books, she readily agreed to give one of her stories to use in this book. I have also used Fakir Mohan's story 'Rebati' in my book. In it, I have worked on an interface between economics and literature (The name of the book is Her Story So Far-Tales of the Girl Child in India, Penguin Books). As for Mr. Lalit Mansingh, who is Odisha's pride, I had the good fortune of having his advice and moral support for running the Foundation. I have, on many occasions, met him at his office, as well as his residence and bounced my ideas with him. I would love to add here the literary bond that his father, Shri Mayadhar Mansingh, shared with Fakir Mohan Senapati. He was a renowned poet and writer of Odisha and was also a Padmashri awardee. In fact, he wrote 'Saraswati Fakiramohan' which is a biography of Fakir Mohan Senapati. He can be truly dubbed as the 'Saraswat banshadhara' of Fakir Mohan Senapati. I have had many interactions with Mr. Jatin Das, the eminent artist. He had asked for my help in setting up the Odisha Forum, and I have been one of its founding members. The forum has taken wings

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under the stewardship of Shri Gokul Patnaik and is now a name to reckon with in Delhi, USA and many other places. For so many years since its inception, I have been editing the souvenir of Odisha Forum and have found it a pleasure doing so.

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CHAPTER 15

My Mother Binapani

My mother was not a religious person, but was extremely appreciative of the aesthetics of the temple architecture and the decoration of the deities with fresh flowers, the burning lamps, the vermilion marks on the foreheads, the fragrance of the chandan, and the alpana and rangoli that is a part of the festivals. All this inspired her, but religious fanaticism was what she abhorred. She, however, used to be awed by the deep faith which the sea of humanity used to repose in Lord Jagannath. She used to say "What a spectacular thing it was to see millions of people on one particular day of the "Rath Yatra" with the single-minded devotion concentrate on Lord Jagannath. This faith reposed in the Lord must be the source of so much energy. It surely is a wondrous thing". What struck me about this was Binapani's rational thinking.

She could talk to men on an equal footing, and since she was the only girl student in the class, she had only boys to interact with. She had a stern demeanour and was dreaded by boys. She, however, was friendly with Gopinath Mohanty, the eminent writer, while the renowned poet, Sachi Routraty, was her peer. She had finer sensibilities of the rarest kind but perhaps could not realise her creative potential for she sacrificed all her ambitions in bringing me up. She was the sole breadwinner of the house.

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She was extremely critical by nature. Her theory was that one should always strive to excel and not be complacent about one's achievements. Settling for mediocrity was a big no for her. She was a bit unhappy that people around, including her, did not attain excellence whatever be the reasons. However, I found her a perfectionist that can be substantiated by the following fact apart from many other instances. In those days, letters were written in post cards for communication purposes. My mother would first make a rough draft and then copy it on to the post card. She always insisted that I do the same thing which appeared a tedious task for me. Various other instances can be cited. For example, she was very particular about how I dressed, whether my attire was in keeping with what the occasion demanded. She often used to correct my posture, and also corrected the pitch of my voice when I sang. Incidentally, I was a vocal artist in All India Radio (AIR, Cuttack and Delhi). In short, she was highly critical of me for everything that I did. She was an unrelenting perfectionist.

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CHAPTER 16

My Father Kasinath Misra

My father, an extremely well read and highly educated person, was a dreamer – in short, a happy-go-lucky person. Books were his companion; verbal interaction was his pastime. Shri Gopinath Mohanty (the famous writer) had remarked about him "looking at Kasinath Misra babu one can say he is the living example of 'Anand Murti', here is an extremely good-looking man, extremely capable physically and intellectually, and yet happy not doing anything". Gopinath Mohanty incidentally was my mother's classmate. His son is married to my cousin Nivedita, Shri Bipin Bihari Chowdhary's daughter. He was Sarojini Chowdhary's (Fakir Mohan's daughter) son. Since he was my uncle and a first cousin to my mother, we used to address him as Bipin mamu. He had hearing and speech impairment. The term 'specially – abled' applies to him in a very positive way for he was extremely talented and in fact, the first oil painting of Fakir Mohan Senapati was done by him. This painting of his has been extensively used all over Odisha and beyond for various publication purposes. I have a beautiful reprint of this in my possession.

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CHAPTER 17

Gatia: Didima's Most Trusted Domestic Help

Grandma had a faithful servant named Gatia. He fitted the description of the "Old Faithful." Short and stout, he was always seen around the house doing this, that or the other. There were many other servants, but Gatia was Grandma's most trusted and also was an easy target for putting the blame for whatever went wrong in the house. He spoke very little and took his job very seriously. He was almost like a permanent fixture in the house. Gatia was sort of a Man Friday – from making beds every single day to cleaning the house, cleaning the cow sheds, running errands throughout the day, he had made himself indispensable. He came as a young boy to the Bakhrabad house, we were told, and I saw him till I was 25 years of age. He must be around fifty then. I often miss his presence now. How unfortunate that we soon forgot all about him in the course of our lives. I wish he was there now so that I could take care of him, and support him in his old age. One day I was told by my cousins that he was no more. I felt as if a part of me had perished.

I look back and wonder how different our living and sleeping styles were then as compared to what they are now. Going to sleep without the AC being on during summer is simply unimaginable. The doors and windows have to be tightly

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shut, the comforter in place, the remote control handy and one must make sure that various paraphernalia are in place. But in those days in the summer months in the Bakhrabad house, we slept outdoors under the open sky, counting the stars and trying to figure out the constellations, watching the waning and the waxing moon, the gently swaying tall trees around through the mosquito nets (the nets used were English nets). It was an experience to be cherished.

Didima had trained Gatia in the art of bed making. The residents of the Bakhrabad house then were ten in number. It was almost like a ritual performed late in the evening, out in the open in the backyard, next to the garden. The beds were put side by side, and a big bed for us kids with a huge mosquito net was laid. Gatia got the mattresses out every evening and had a wick broom (Khadika jhadu) to beat the dust out of them, spread the white bedsheets, then place the pillows with white covers at the appropriate place and of course not to forget the cylindrical longish side pillows for extra comfort. He would then tuck the sheets and mosquito curtains. Our beds were then finally set. Of course, brass tumblers and earthen containers (surais) for water were placed on the side. We had to pour out the water if needed. Making beds during winter time was different, and we slept inside. Gatia, our old faithful, now in hindsight, appears unique with his devotedness, honesty, and sincerity. He was so endearing in his own way but taken for granted by everyone. At the same time, in some way or the other, we all liked him since he was part and parcel of our lives.

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CHAPTER 18
Didima

Fakir Mohan Senapati has categorically mentioned how dutiful his daughter-in-law was and how well she looked after him after he had consumed sulphuric acid by mistake. Fakir Mohan's fondness for his daughter-in-law comes out loud and clear in a poem that he wrote on her. This poem "Nababadhu-ra-Awhan" eloquently expresses his feeling of love and gratitude for his daughter-in-law, Hiranprabha.

As for me, Didima was an epitome of virtue and talent. She was one who seemed to exude unconditional love for all and at all times. As for me she was almost like a mother during the formative years of my life. During some of my intimate conversations with didima, I recounted to her my experiences at St. Joseph's Convent School, Cuttack where I did my schooling to start with and then went on to study in Bhubaneswar. When I was hardly a four-year-old kid, I recall the memorable occasion of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru passing by our school in an open jeep kind-of vehicle, waving at the crowds around. We were fortunate that he halted for a few brief moments in front of our school which was then housed in unit II, Bhubaneswar. I was the lucky chosen little girl to garland him. This incident I narrated to Didima to her great elation and she felt proud that her little grand-daughter could greet this towering personality, in person. Then sometime later in life, described to her, my stay at Lady Brabourne College, Calcutta, my exposure to Rabindra

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Sangeet and Rabindra Natak. I told her how I danced in plays like Chandalika, sang songs from 'Bhanu Singher Padavali' and also recounted my experiences from my life spent at different places thereafter. She was in fact, in those days my soul friend. She was one who would spend time with me and could understand me. This was when I used to visit her off and on at Bakhrabad house, Cuttack.

Coming back to Didima, she was an extremely accomplished woman of her times. She had passed her Matriculation examination at that time and was a Bengali who hailed from Dacca. I have been told by my mother and others that she was handpicked by Fakir Mohan Senapati to be his daughter in law.

Apart from passing the matriculation examination, which was a rare feat those days, especially for a girl. Besides, she was a trained pianist and a soprano singer to boot. I have seen her singing while playing the piano at the Brahmo Samaj Hall in Cuttack. What a lady she was, absolutely poised and used to carry herself with unsurpassed elegance. On occasions, we all used to go up to the terrace of the Bakhrabad house in Cuttack and Didima, surrounded by her grandchildren, used to break into a song. I guess, some of that talent has been passed on to me. I was always attracted to music right from a tender age. I used to sit there perched on the terrace wall next to her with a gaping mouth and admiring eyes and almost devoured the soulful music pouring out of her lips. The memory of the lilting music has stayed with me ever since.

She was a very aesthetic person. Though short-statured and not very fair, she had an unparalleled grace about her. Her visage exuded a rare charm. I remember how she used to come out of the bathroom smelling nice and pure and then she used

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Cuticura powder all over her body and especially around her neck. I often nestled against her and was engulfed in a divine feeling. I have recollections of her standing in front of an antique mirror, which might even be existing now. She would tie a thin towel (called 'gamuchha') on her wet hair in order to set her tresses into desired folds. There were no mechanical devices those days for setting the hair. So, this was the way it was done for enhancing the beauty of a lady's tresses. Once these were a little dry, she would remove the towel and give them finishing touches. On occasions, when she would go out, she used a perfume, which my mother was also fond of using and the perfume was 'Evening in Paris.' I have looked out for this perfume, but in vain. However, the fragrance lingers on in my memory.

Most of what I remember of Didima is, that she was always dressed in a borderless white saree and a loose white blouse to go with it. White saree because she was widowed rather early and it was customary to wear this. Mohini Mohan died young; I think he passed away when he was touching on sixty. Hence, I have very little recollections of him. Most of what I know about him was based on what I have heard from my mother and of course from his books like 'Bibidha Prasanga'. This, I am getting digitised now with the help of an aficionado of Oriya literature, living in Sweden. This I believe is being done in collaboration with Google. Didima being the only daughter-in-law of FM Senapati was gifted lots of precious jewellery made those days by British jewellers. These were exquisitely crafted. Didima once recounted how when she was travelling to Calcutta (Kolkata) she carried a small trunkful of jewellery. The coolie who was carrying it on his head somehow must have got the scent of it and slipped off quietly with the treasure. Now, for a woman to lose her jewellery can be a

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traumatic experience, but she had such equipoise that she did not grieve for long. She still had a lot of jewellery with her. The loss is felt more keenly by us, her descendants, who think how rich we would have been had that incident not taken place. Whatever ornaments were left Didima distributed amongst all her granddaughters. I got some very nice pieces. People said since I was Didima's favorite I got those. But, no, Didima was never partial. She believed in fair play. I remember, on one occasion, we cousins stood in front of the mirror, and the youngest cousin, named Bulai, asked Didima to tell us who of us all was the fairest and most beautiful. She paused for a while and said, "none of you" and there the matter ended.

Didima had a pet cat called 'Nakphuli.' She would perch on Didima's wooden almirah whenever she liked to take a nap. Didima used to keep a big piece of fish for her out of her own share. Since I was attached to Didima, I thought it was my bounden duty to take care of 'Nakphuli.' Once, when she had a boil behind her ear, it was me who nursed her back to health. Didima had a room to herself, where she had plenty of books, a hand-operated sewing machine besides other knick-knacks. She would sew and mend clothes, recycle old sarees and stitch kanthas that were so nice and soft to the touch and served as real comforters during Cuttack's mild winter. It was in this room she used to tell me about FM Senapati, her father-in-law, his likes and dislikes, his habits and how he was always busy doing something or the other. She used to do exquisite embroidery also. They were masterpieces. Didima was an avid reader. Bankim Chandra and Rabindranath Tagore were her favorite authors. She used to continue reading novels and stories into her old age. I remember, when she was over seventy-five years old, she could read without glasses. She had very few grey hairs and had nice soft skin. I used to go to sleep by her side and feel her

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skin with my fingers. It was such a wonderful feeling. I sometimes feel I was closer to my grandma than to my mother. May be because Didima was always kind and loving and my mother more often than not rather stern. When I grew up and was a budding lady, she would say in a few years you shall get married, and you will get a very handsome husband. Sure enough, I did marry a man with very good looks. Alas, if only Didima could be there to bless us! She was gone by then.

Didima fits into the definition of feminine grace and virtue. In short, she was a woman in the truest sense of the term. She embodied in her all the graces that an ideal woman can possess. It's a pity that she has gone unsung. Hiranprabha had the qualities every woman should emulate. Besides all this, I have memories of her public dealings, which were impeccable. She was known as a grand hostess. She used to take pleasure in feeding people and looking after her guests' comfort keeping in mind the minutest of details. It's good even to this day, some people remember her for her courteousness and generosity.

The first death I witnessed was Didima's. It was a heart-rending experience for me. It was for the first time in my life that I saw a funeral pyre. My mother, however, dissuaded me from standing there for long. When she got back, I found that she got the ring that my Didima had worn all these years. It had a little diamond stud which had fallen out long back. This, my mother wished to preserve as a memento and years later she gave it to my son (her first grandson) as a token of blessing. I treasure these sentiments a lot. My mother also often talked about Didima and used to say that she was FM Senapati's favorite.

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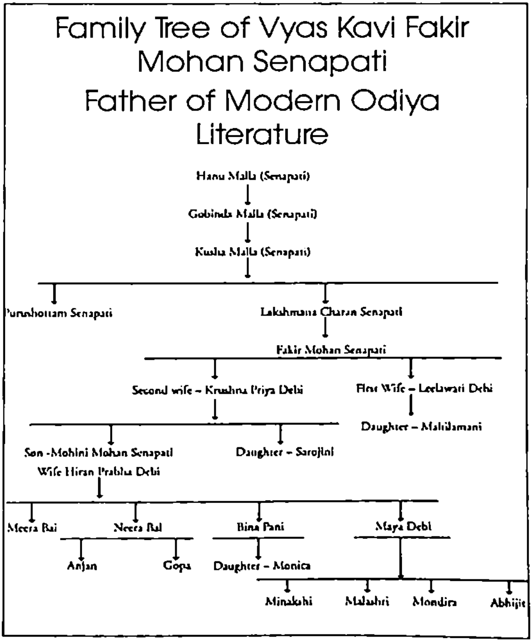
CHAPTER 19

The Will, Didima, My Mother and Me

Before I take up the matter of the will it would be perhaps in the fitness of things that I make the reader privy to the family tree. Incidentally, this family tree also features in Pratibha Ray's novel 'Maharani Putra.' Below is the family tree.



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ମହାରାଣୀ ପୁତ୍ର

ପ୍ରତିଭା ରାୟ

(ଜ୍ଞାନପୀଠ ସମ୍ମାନରେ ଭୂଷିତା)

ଉତ୍ସର୍ଗ

ଉତ୍କଳ ଜନନୀର ପୁଣ୍ୟ କ୍ରାନ୍ତିକାରୀ ବରପୁତ୍ର ବ୍ୟାସକବି ଫକୀରମୋହନ ସେନାପତି
ଓ ମହାନ ବିପ୍ଳବୀ ଧରଣୀଧର ନାଏକଙ୍କ ଅମ୍ଳାନ ସ୍ମୃତିରେ ....।

ଓଡ଼ିଆ ସାହିତ୍ୟର ଜନକ ବ୍ୟାସକବି ଫକୀରମୋହନ ସେନାପତିଙ୍କର ବଂଶଲତା

ହରୁ ମଲ୍ଲ (ସେନାପତି)
↓
ଗୋବିନ୍ଦ ମଲ୍ଲ (ସେନାପତି)
↓
କୃଷ୍ଣ ମଲ୍ଲ (ସେନାପତି)

- ପୁରୁଷୋତ୍ତମ ସେନାପତି
- ଲକ୍ଷ୍ମଣ ଚରଣ ସେନାପତି
  ↓
  ଫକୀରମୋହନ ସେନାପତି
  - ପ୍ରଥମ ସ୍ତ୍ରୀ. ଲୀଳାବତୀ ଦେବୀ → କନ୍ୟା. ମହିଳାଦେବୀ
  - ଦ୍ୱିତୀୟ ସ୍ତ୍ରୀ. କୃଷ୍ଣପ୍ରିୟା ଦେବୀ
    - ମୋହିନୀମୋହନ ସେନାପତି
      ସ୍ତ୍ରୀ. ହିରଣ୍ମୟୀ ପ୍ରଭା ଦେବୀ
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        କନ୍ୟା. ମନିକା
      - ମାୟା ଦେଈ
        - ମଧୁରା
        - ଅଭିଜିତ୍
        - ମାନସୀ
        - ମାଳଶ୍ରୀ
    - କନ୍ୟା. ସରୋଜିନୀ

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Fakir Mohan Senapati, my mother used to say, had perhaps acted impulsively when he willed his property to his daughter-in-law Hiranprabha's instead of willing it to his only son Mohan. Some people, however, say that this shows FM Senapati's broad mindedness.

The other day I happened to read the will written by my great grandfather Fakir Mohan Senapati, which is now available in a published form. I marveled at the way he has bestowed so much faith and obviously love on my grandmother (Didima). The will reflects all that plus his progressive attitude towards women and the implicit faith which he had on his daughter- in-law. Fakir Mohan, I am sure, pretty well knew that this unconventional move on this part will not alter any relationship equations in the family. It was just a childish and impulsive move on his part. The father- son disagreements could be seen as a very normal thing to happen in any family, whatsoever. The drastic action can however, be expected only from a person with highly evolved independent thought process, like Fakir Mohan.

I found my mother's name in the will along with my other aunts. Then I recollected how my mother Binapani used to narrate the way Didima used to tease my grandfather Mohini Mohan Senapati and jocularly say "See now I am the sole owner of a vast property!." Then Mohini Mohan used to come out with a fitting repartee saying "Oh sure! Why not? You brought it all from Dacca, your hometown." There was a good laugh over it, and it was all taken in a humorous vein.

Mohini Mohan didn't make an issue of it, for he very well knew that his devoted wife would obey his instructions and never do things that would go against the best interests of all concerned.

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Fakir Mohan died in 1918 and years later, in 1950, there was this partition deed made where my mother inherited FM's Balasore property, my youngest aunt inherited the Bakhrabad house, and my eldest aunt Neera Debi, later known as Maitri inherited the Buxi Bazaar house. But unfortunately, enough my mother's share of the property was acquired by the government for making it into a memorial. That, however, is another story.

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CHAPTER 20

The Making of 'Anvesan' – A Film on the Life and Works of FM Senapati

By now I had immersed myself in Fakir Mohan's world through my research on the persona. Suddenly, one day, the thought of making a film on him, crossed my mind. This desire was fueled by a little prompting from the eminent writer, J.P Das, who said, "If a close family member doesn't take things forward so far as FM Senapati's contribution is concerned, who else will?" Later, many people promised to help but gave me only their moral support. For five years, I went from pillar to post, requested the Odisha government and ministers for financial help, but in vain. Everyone was sympathetic and unequivocally said it was a great idea, but again no financial support came. I then thought of trying my luck with the government at the Centre. I drafted an elaborate proposal, approached the resident commissioner in Delhi and a few others here and there, but to no avail.

It was rather daring on my part to even think of such an enterprise. But then, when the "mind is without fear and the head held high," to quote Tagore, things work out somehow, I suppose. I set out to look for funds. This of course was preceded by my study and research on FM's works. Thereafter I went scouting for funds. Ran from pillar to post, left no stone unturned, approached the Odisha government but to no avail. Then like a spark one day the idea dawned on me that I should

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approach DD Delhi. I presented my project proposal to the Director General Doordarshan with a lot of trepidation. Little did I know, that he would like the idea at once.

He, being a highly evolved person, could see the merit of the project. He approved it and issued orders to DD Bhubaneswar to take it up. And so, the film 'Anvesan' happened. My joy knew no bounds. The adrenaline rush helped me expedite the work. Without losing anytime, I started contacting people, did research and sundry other things. I set out to pick the best people for the team. I must acknowledge the initial guidance I got from the eminent dramatist Ananta Mohapatra. Mohapatra the great theatre personality and Lalatendu Rath, another capable person were there to help me with my project. I must acknowledge here the valuable tips I got from the eminent theatre activist, Mr. Ananta Mohapatra. Mr. Lalatendu Mohapatra, an actor, and a very knowledgeable person was very helpful, too. I must also mention here that in collecting material on the background, we were greatly assisted by Dr. Kailash Patnaik. I remain deeply indebted to him. We set off for Balasore and to places where Fakir Mohan Senapati served as Dewan in British India.

In Balasore, I got immense support from Shri Brajanath Rath. He being an aficionado in Fakir Mohan's studies proved to be an asset for our project.

We also visited different libraries and museums in Odisha, looked at relevant records and documents. Then the shooting started in right earnest. Shanti Kanan in Balasore was, of course, a pivotal point. The Niligiri Palace experience remains indelible in my mind. The 'pokhari (village pond) and the hatta (village fair)' with the Niligiri hills as a backdrop was bewitching. Another fascinating experience was the scene that was shot in

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'Bhuja Khia Pira' in Balasore. The whole scene was meticulously planned with the procession and 'chadar chadhao' etc. It suddenly started raining. I was on tenterhooks and started praying fervently. My prayers did not fall on deaf ears. And as luck would have it, it turned out to be only a cloud – burst and not rain as such. Everything cleared up soon, and we could resume the shooting. The Muslim residents were very cooperative, and it was indeed a lifetime experience for me. We even took a few shots at Chandipur to depict the ships and sails that were part of the storyline.

Stepping into Balasore brought back memories so very dear to me. I was in school in Barabati Girls High School in Balasore, where my mother was the headmistress somewhere in the late fifties and early sixties. We stayed for some time in Fakir Mohan's own house in Mallikashpur. Thereafter, we shifted to the headmistress' bungalow within the school premises, but we often used to visit Shanti Kanan, the garden which FM Senapati tended with such care. He had planted many plants, and there were many fruiting trees and several marble statues. I do not see them there anymore. Coming to think of the assorted types of plants that were seen there one could say Fakir Mohan was a botanist of sorts and an environmentalist as well. I am told by people from the FM Sahitya Chakra that credit goes to Senapati for introducing to Odisha many new plants like tea and vegetables like cauliflower and cabbage.

Coming back to Shanti Kanan, I recollect the precious marble collectibles and statues that FM Senapati had installed there. I still remember clearly the marble statue of a lady with a pitcher in her hand from which water used to pour out. A flight of steps led to a pond in the premises. My mother, Binapani (FM Senapati's granddaughter), used to tell me that there were different kinds of colored fishes in the pond. It could be the gold fish, for all you know. All that is gone now. It's a pity that

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not one marble statue exists there anymore. It breaks one's heart to describe the dilapidated state in which things there exist now. Fortunately, enough, the statue that he built of himself is in one piece, and I am also doubly thankful to the Almighty for the fact that the Sarva Dharma Sthambh that he had built also stands tall to this date. It bears testimony to the secular ideals that he held so dear. The sthambh (pillar) has depictions of all religious symbols: Islam Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, etc. More than religion, it's the spirituality that the idea behind evokes. How wonderful it would be if people paid tribute to him by showing equal respect to all these religions now. His is a voice of sanity in this hour of bitter strife and turmoil. I was so touched by Fakir Mohan Senapati's secular bent of mind that I have now introduced the concept of 'Manav Dharma' (the religion of humanism I would like to term it as) in our working module in FMF. Its logo features the Sarva Dharma Samanyaya Sthambh. As chairperson of FMF, I make sure that this is displayed in all the activities that we carry out from time to time. This apart, we are trying to put this in our workshop module meant primarily for school children. This, however, is yet to take off due to lack of funds. It's a pity, and I must express my anguish over the fact that crores if rupees fund religious fanatics of all hues and to babas of all kinds who go on cheating the gullible masses. It is a good thing that many of them have been exposed now and put behind bars.

The tele film 'Anvesan' that I made on the life and works of Fakir Mohan Senapati falls under the genre of docudrama and is very different from a feature film. It won the National award for the best tele film of the year. I was in due course felicitated by the chief minister of Odisha Hon'ble Naveen Patnaik as well as the CEO of Prasar Bharati. The challenge started with making a docudrama, and the challenge got compounded when it came to presenting someone as great as

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Fakir Mohan Senapati, who has been labeled as one of the leading lights of Indian literature and a pioneering novelist of India in the field of social realism, by none other than Professor Sisir Das. Sisir Das is an eminent scholar, author of History of Indian Literature published by Sahitya Akademi. Incidentally Fakir Mohan Senapati predates Munshi Premchand and Tagore.

I faced many challenges in making this docudrama and in rendering Fakir Mohan's works into cinema and related genres like drama. Leaving aside the problem of mobilising funds, there were problems of weaving various elements that surround this great cultural figure and at the same time keeping the main thrust intact. Elements like societal concerns were at the centre of his thoughts, and one can see these expressed through his works. I see it as nothing short of activism. This had to be kept in mind. His secular ideas and his humanism constituted another aspect which had to be brought out clearly, and for this, we used his 'Sarva Dharma Samanva Sthambha' apart from a recital by Kelu Charan Mahapatra, the doyen of Odissi dance. I requested guru Kelu Charan Mahapatra to emote the 'Boudhavatar Kavya.' To bring out humour, which is another strong element of his writings, we used Gopal Chhotray's musical rendition of Fakir Mohan Senapati's 'Patent medicine' and to engage the attention of the youth and children we used puppets. To get across to the Odia diaspora in the USA and other places outside of India we used English subtitles. The objective was to reach out to a bigger audience. For the film to be better appreciated by people in the Hindi speaking belt and the general public we had the eminent scholar, Namvar Singh to give an introduction to the film. He gave a fascinating introduction, where he spoke of the cow serving as a central theme for many writers especially Munshi Premchand and Fakir Mohan Senapati and many others. He even drew a parallel between Fakir Mohan's writings and

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those of Antony Checkov. We also bore in mind the need to attract modern day youth. Hence, I introduced in the storyline a young protagonist. The problem of credibility also had to be factored in. So, my co director Mr. Lalatendu Rath was categorical that a part of the film had to have someone belonging to Fakir Mohan's lineage. I happened to be the chosen one. So, I have also acted in the film in a major role. Narration has also been done by me. Didima was also portrayed in the film through a recreation of a very oft quoted incident from Fakir Mohan's life. When we started shooting the film, we decided that we would follow the autobiography closely and faithfully.

In my film 'Anvesan' made on the life and works of Fakir Mohan, I made it a point to present a drama version of the love and care that my didima (Hiran Prabha Senapati) had bestowed on him. A very well-known and oft-quoted incident from FM's life relates to the excruciating pain he underwent after swallowing the deadly sulphuric acid that he drank by mistake and how his daughter-in-law Hiranprabha nursed him back to health. My mother often used to say that Fakir Mohan was extremely fond of my didima, Hiranprabha. All this and more has been very sensitively recreated in the film. Besides many other things, we have incorporated facts concerning the great famine Naanka Durbhiksha and depicted it through pictures, sketches and otherwise.

For enhancing the film's appeal and of course its credibility, we used shots from Parbati Ghosh's film on 'Chhamana Guntha.' In the film, I have interviewed many stalwarts like Sachi Rautray, Sitakant Mohapatra, Sisir Das, Pratibha Ray, Indira Goswami, Manoj Das, Akshay Mohanty, Parbati Gosh and Professor Rick Shweder from University of Chicago.

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The making of the film is an experience that I would cherish till the end. To begin with, I am not a professional film maker though I did take a course in film-making at the Russian Embassy in Delhi. But, when I decided to make a film on a legend like FMS, I found myself on unknown ground. Shri Brajanath Rath, the president of Fakir Mohan Sahitya Chakra in Balasore, is one to whom I owe my gratitude for his guidance and the background material on Fakir Mohan Senapati that he lent us. I recollect how he used to relate about Fakir Mohan's life and works extempore. His knowledge in this regard was astounding. Apart from being a sahitya sadhak, he was a Fakir Mohan Sadhak. During the filming of 'Anvesan,' we used to almost camp at his residence, and he used to, with care and sincerity, draw out various documents for us to substantiate our facts. He is no more, but his memory lingers on. Here was a man who was truly devoted to his mission and always ready to help others. I am fortunate to have come in close contact with him during the course of the filming. Others and the filming crew, I am sure, too have the same feeling.

The film was sponsored by Prasar Bharati. Later, when it won The National Tele Film award for being the best docudrama of the year, Doordarshan archives requested me to make an abridged version of it. Mrinalini, the director of DD Archives, and myself sat down and edited it with the help of other experts in the field. Later, I thought about its outreach and decided to subtitle it in English. The Odiya Diaspora in the USA had evinced interest in the film. Hence, I asked them to send in a request to DD if they needed the film in the DVD format. They put in their request and DVDs were made. This is now part of DD/ Prasar Bharti Archives. I heaved a sigh of relief after this was done. I put below a document to substantiate some of the above-mentioned facts.

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ORISSA SOCIETY OF THE AMERICAS

35th Annual Convention, Dallas, Texas

OSA Officers

OSA 2004 Convention

February 20, 2004

Ms. Monica Das
New Delhi, India

Dear Ms. Das:

It would be our privilege to invite you as a guest to the 35th Annual Convention of the Orissa Society of the Americas (OSA), which will take place in Dallas, Texas during July 2-4, 2004, at the Hilton Executive Conference Center. We would specifically like you to present your documentary film on Phakir Mohan Senapati during a dedicated session of the convention, followed by a lecture and question-answer session related to your film making experiences. We would also like you to participate in the convention's Women's Forum. We will cover your travel expenses to Dallas and all other living expenses for the duration of your visit to the convention. In order to assist you in putting together your application for a US tourist visa, I am including the following documents with this letter.

- A letter of invitation to attend the OSA Convention by Mr. Hari Arjun Patro, the Secretary-Treasurer of OSA
- Letter from Mr. Patro to the US Consulate General, New Delhi pledging financial support and requesting to grant you a visitors visa
- A completed and notarized affidavit of support (INS form I-134)
- Supporting bank statements describing OSA's financial position
- A copy of the 503-1c certificate, which shows that OSA is registered a non-profit and tax-exempt organization
- INS Forms DS-156 and DS-157, which have to be completed by you

You will need two passport size photos and the necessary visa application fees to complete the application for a US tourist visa. Please save your receipts for the visa fees so that we may latter reimburse you for it.

I do hope that you will have no problems in obtaining the visa. However, please do not hesitate to contact me (ntripathy@charter.net, 940 382-7305), or Mr. Patro (hpatro@flash.net, 972-333-8000) if you need further assistance.

Sincerely,

Niranjan Tripathy
Convener, 35th OSA Convention

2219 Carriage Hill
Denton, Texas 76207

Invitation from OSA, Dallas, USA to present my film *Anvesan*

Recounting the experience of my acting in the film, during the course of the shooting, when I first stepped into the Fakir Mohan house in Balasore (which is now a museum), I somehow had a 'déjà vu'. For I lived in this house with my parents during my school going days in Balasore. In a scene in the film where I am climbing up the stairs, I experienced goose bumps and

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recalled the by – gone days spent here. There were many other incidents that I could talk about endlessly.

I received many accolades for this film. I was felicitated by the CEO Prasar Bharti and honorable chief minister Naveen Patnaik at a function held in Rabindra Mandap, Bhubaneswar. I was invited by the Odiya Society of America's to their 31st convention at Dallas, Texas, USA and thereafter at Seattle. The invitation I received from OSA was a matter of pride for me for the reason that my objective was to reach out to the young and old of the Indian diaspora in the USA as well as other countries for familiarising the diaspora with our roots and about our intangible heritage through Fakir Mohan Senapati. The film was also screened many times at India Habitat Centre and India International Centre in Delhi as well as in Odisha. That the film docudrama saw the light of day was indeed very satisfying and humbling experience for me. So, it was eventually all a case of love's labours not lost. I give below some newspaper reports for the sake of information.

4

HAPPE

A great grandaughter's tribute

Newspaper Report in Hindustan times dated September 18, 2003 on my film *Anvesan*

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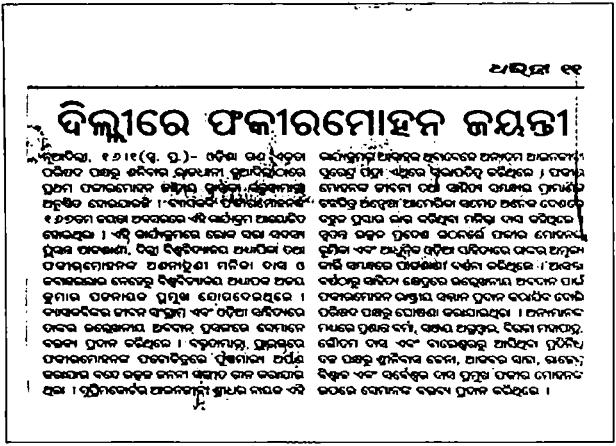

ଦିଲ୍ଲୀରେ ଫକୀରମୋହନ ଜୟନ୍ତୀ

Newspaper Report on Odia on Fakir Mohan's Jayanti Divas on the rave reviews that the film has got nationally and internationally.

In this film which is a docu-drama, I have incorporated interviews from various celebrities from India and abroad. The list of people interviewed was as follows:

- Professor Sisir Das
- Professor Namvar Singh
- Smt. Indira Goswami
- Dr. Manoj Das
- Shrimati Pratibha Ray (Gyanpith awardee)
- Shri Sachi Routray (1st Odiya Gyanpith awardee)
- Akshay Mohanty (legendary singer of Odisha)
- Shri Sita Kanta Mohapatra (Gyanpith awardee)
- Dr. Rick Shweder (Professor Chicago University)

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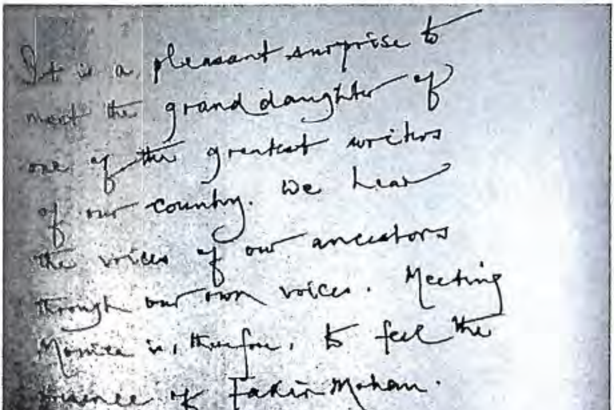
- Professor Aurobindo Giri
- Shri Brajanath Rath
- Dr. Debendra Das
- Dr. Kailash Patnaik
- Shri Kelucharan Mahapatra (Odissi dance guru)

I would like to put down the kind words written for me during the filming of 'Anvesan' by eminent people who are significantly relevant to matters concerning Fakir Mohan Senapati. I have quoted below the first five in the list given above. The following are the words which I will cherish forever. The following pictures are photocopies of their hand-written comments that have been presented in the respective order as mentioned above.


It is a pleasant surprise to
meet the grand daughter of
one of the greatest writers
of our country. We hear
the voices of our ancestors
through our own voices. Meeting
Monica is, therefore, to feel the
presence of Fakir Mohan.
I wish her all success.

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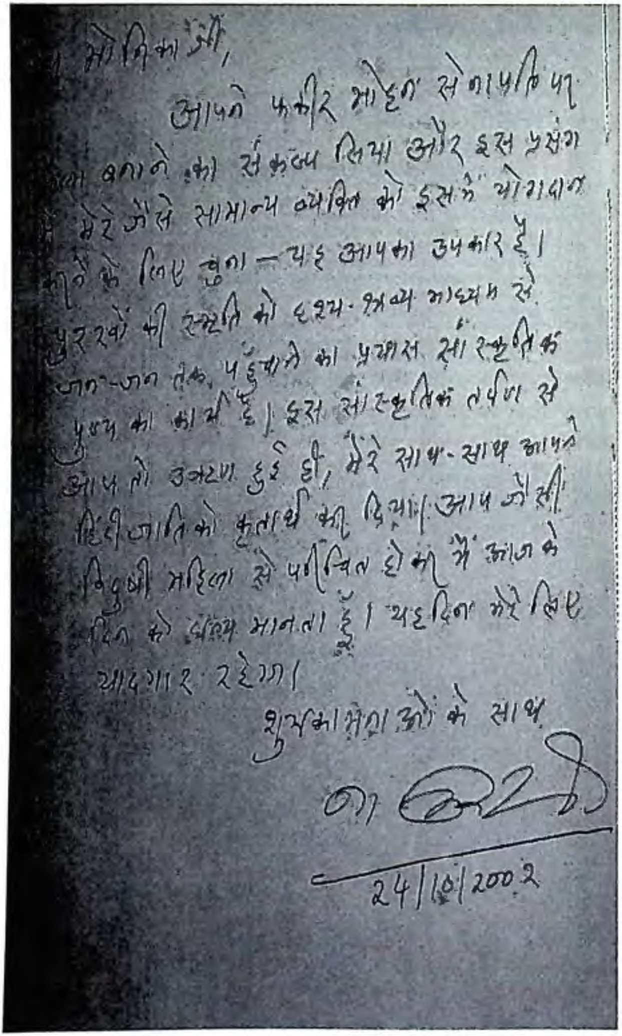
मोनिका जी,

आपने फकीर मोहन सेनापति पर [फिल्म] बनाने का संकल्प लिया और इस प्रसंग में मेरे जैसे सामान्य व्यक्ति को इसमें योगदान करने के लिए चुना — यह आपका उपकार है। पुरखों की स्मृति को दृश्य-श्रव्य माध्यम से जन-जन तक पहुँचाने का प्रयास सांस्कृतिक पुण्य का कार्य है। इस सांस्कृतिक तर्पण से आप तो उऋण हुई ही, मेरे साथ-साथ आपने हिंदी जाति को कृतार्थ कर दिया। आप जैसी विदुषी महिला से परिचित होकर मैं आज के दिन को धन्य मानता हूँ। यह दिन मेरे लिए यादगार रहेगा।

शुभकामनाओं के साथ

24/10/2002

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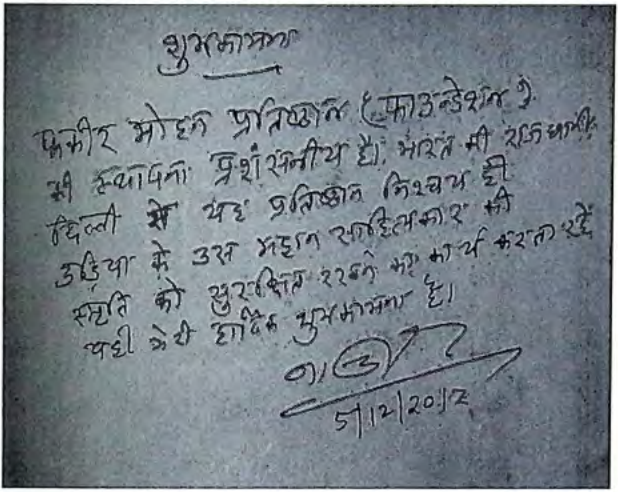
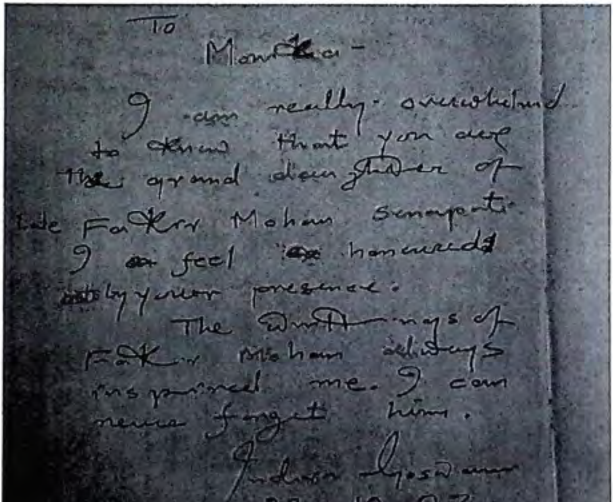


शुभकामना

फकीर मोहन प्रतिष्ठान (फाउन्डेशन)
की स्थापना प्रशंसनीय है। भारत की राजधानी
दिल्ली में यह प्रतिष्ठान निश्चय ही
उड़िया के उस महान साहित्यकार की
स्मृति को सुरक्षित रखने का कार्य करता रहे
यही मेरी हार्दिक शुभकामना है।

5/12/2012



To
[illegible] -
I am really overwhelmed
to know that you are
the grand daughter of
late Fakir Mohan Senapati.
I feel honoured
by your presence.
The writings of
Fakir Mohan always
inspired me. I can
never forget him.
Indira Goswami
22. 10. 02

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Pratibha Ray's book in which Fakir Mohan Senapati's family tree features

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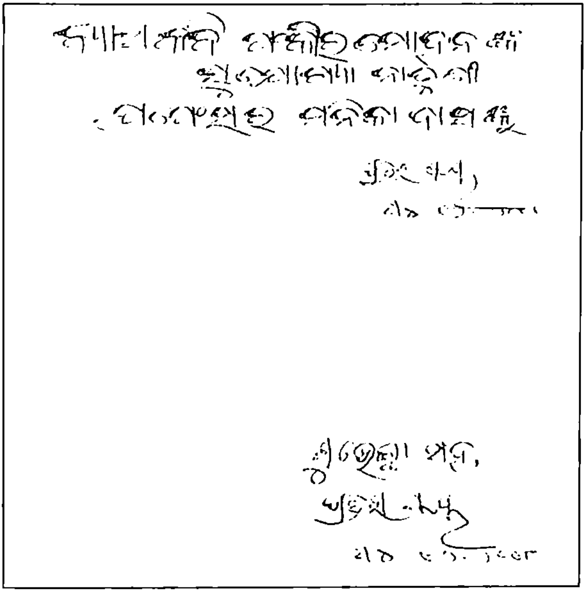

Special note to Monica Das from Shrimati Pratibha Ray in Odia describing her as a worthy grand daughter of Fakir Mohan Senapati.

I am glad that with the necessary efforts put in, I could successfully, with the help of Prasar Bharti, bring out DVDs of the film. With the help of the Director of Doordarshan Archives, Mrs. Kamalini and Professor Namvar Singh, I could even subtitle it in English. Two hundred copies of it were booked by viewers (mostly Odiya) in the USA. The proceeds went to Doordarshan. The original three-hour film is now in the possession of Bhubaneswar Doordarshan. DVDs of the film (edited version) are available for sale at the Doordarshan counter, New Delhi.

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CHAPTER 21

International Presence of FM Senapati

Over the years I came to know that FM is an internationally acknowledged writer. An international conference was organised (3rd January, 2007) under the joint auspices of Developing Countries Research Centre, University of Delhi and The Future of Minority Studies (FMS) Research Project South Asia Program, Cornell University on the topic of 'The Literary View from Below and Fakir Mohan Senapati's Six Acres and a Third and Radical Social Critique in Modern South Asian Literature'. I was then a fellow at the above-mentioned Developing Countries Research Centre. I was also active in the organisational work of this conference. My film 'Anvesan' was also screened then. I, also organised a dance drama based on Fakir Mohan's *'Chha Mana Atha Guntha'* (Six Acres and a Third)- 1902, where the performance piece was set to traditional Odissi dance & music. The rendition provided an entrée into Senapati's ironic social critique on issues of gender equality, the abuse of spirituality in the name of religion, and social and economic injustice. Description of character rather than appearance is underscored with 'Neta', the cow, being the only female physically described. The clever machinations of 'Champa' the zamindar, 'Mangaraj', to steal land and cow from the simple weaver couple, 'Saria' and 'Bhagia' was presented from a subaltern perspective. In the lead of this performance piece were Sharon Lowen and Kavita Dwibedi, along with narrations of the eminent theatre

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personalities, Vinod and Kavita Nagpal. This inaugural function was followed by an international conference on Fakir Mohan's writings and in memory of Sisir Kumar Das. There was a discussion with a set of pre-eminent panelists consisting of, U.R Ananthamurthy (Writer), Namwar Singh (Jawaharlal Nehru University), V. Narayana Rao (University of Wisconsin), J.P Das (Writer), Harish Trivedi (University of Delhi). This conference was organised under the overall supervision of Dr. Manoranjan Mohanty, an expert in Chinese studies. At that time, I came across many scholars from all over India and some from abroad who were all assembled there. To name a few, S.P Mohanty of Cornell University, Alka Basu from Cornell University, Eshade University of California, Los Angeles Chandra Talpada Svracuse University GJV Prasad from Jawahar Lal University and N Ram, the Editor Hindu, Indira Goswami University of Delhi V Narayana Roy University of Wisconsin, Harish Trivedi University of Delhi, Sachinanda Mohanty University of Hyderabad. Listening to them was an enlightening experience. This was quite an eye opener for me and more so because my basic discipline is Economics which is a lot different from literature.

What struck me as particularly significant was that an entire issue of EPW (Economic and Political Weekly, Vol XLI No 46, dated November 18-24, 2006), an internationally renowned journal, was devoted to Fakir Mohan Senapati which featured contributions by foreign authors. The article 'Representation of Women and Gender Relations in Six Acres and a Third' written by Claire Horan, caught my attention because gender issues have been my field of interest since 2000.

Soon after year 2000, I became a member of IAFFE (International Association for Feminist Economics). It was headquartered at that time at Nebraska, USA. Now, of course, it

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has shifted to Rice University, Houston, Texas, USA. Nobel laureate Professor Amartya Sen was the President of IAFFE for some time. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have met him in Oxford, UK when I had been there to present my paper under the auspices of IAFFE. I could also present him with my book on the girl child published by Penguin. In fact, under the auspices of IAFFE, I have presented about twelve research papers on women's issues in different universities of the world. Another book which I have done with Harper Collins is based on my research paper on the 'Impact of child marriages on the Human Development Index of India.' Another paper which is specifically on child marriages in Odisha and women's development is in the pipeline, to be brought out by Sage Publications. All this sensitivity regarding gender issues I ascribe to my progressive upbringing given by my parents and grandparents. The liberal education and the general atmosphere in which I was raised perhaps shaped my thoughts regarding women, society and gender balance. Fakir Mohan somewhere must have been in my subconscious psyche.

Later I got to read what the poet and Literary Scholar AK Ramanujan in a famous essay published in 1990 had said or rather posed a question "Is there an Indian way of thinking" and SP Mohanty reflecting on this said "In an analogous way, in closing years of the nineteenth century the Oriya writer Fakir Mohan Senapati appears to have asked himself: "Is there an Indian way of writing a novel?" The scholar and translator of Telugu Literature Vel Cheru Narayana Rao compares 'Six Acres' with another late nineteenth century work, Geurajada Appa Rao's play 'Girls for Sale' to show how both writers deserve to be seen as creators of 'an indigenous modernity 'distinct from colonial modernity. Even more interestingly, the critic Jennifer Harford Vargas links the magical realism of Gabriel Garcia

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Marquez not to Salman Rushdie (the Indian writer whose method readily invites such a comparison) but instead to Senapati. Both 'One Hundred Years of Solitude' and 'Six Acres' try to shake off the burden of the colonial gaze, Vargas notes. At all this, I just happened to have a cursory glance. Nevertheless, it no doubt dazzles me and of course has left in me a deep impact.

All these comments and references have been inspirational for me. It goes without saying that it leaves me with a sense of pride.

No wonder, U.R. Ananthamurti has called Fakir Mohan's Chha Mana Atha Guntha a "foundational text in Indian literary history" and Sitakanta Mahapatra, commenting on Fakir Mohan Senapati's autobiography, says that "FM Senapati's autobiography can be treated as a complete novel by itself." John Boulton of SOAS, London doing his Ph.D. on Fakir Mohan was another shocker for me. All this and more left me completely stupefied, to begin with, and later when all this had sunk in, I felt proud to the core. In fact, I had felt so small before this great icon that I for thirty odd years did not reveal my relationship with him. Later on, at the prodding of many well-wishers and stalwarts, I mustered the courage to venture out and decided to pay tribute to this great icon. JP Das is one of them, who encouraged me to take a step in this direction. By and by, people got to know me. My Foundation in the course of its progress also let the cat out of the bag, and now I stand a seasoned member of the Senapati clan. I must also acknowledge here the moral support extended to me by Professor S P Adhikari, the former vice chancellor of Fakir Mohan University, Balasore. He, besides being a person of erudition, has been very dynamic in adding new dimensions to the University and

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bringing to light Fakir Mohan's greatness through various steps undertaken by him. He deserves the best of kudos.

All this motivated me to institute a Foundation named Fakir Mohan Foundation in New Delhi (website: www.fakirmohanfoundation.com). My ideas and thoughts have been greatly impacted to a large extent by this great iconic figure called Fakir Mohan Senapati.

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CHAPTER 22

Fakir Mohan Foundation, New Delhi

The Fakir Mohan Foundation was registered in Delhi, Jan-2011, Regn. No. 21/Book No. 4, Vol No. 1, 438 / Page 77 to 97, Dt. 13.01.2011 /Sub-Registrar VII, New Delhi.

We in FMF uphold the idea of getting to our roots to understand our culture and all this through our mother languages. In view of the dying use of mother languages amongst the youth of today, it is but imperative that we re-instill the love for the mother tongues in them and reacquaint them with the cultural moorings of the country they belong to.

As for our activities and approach in FMF, the gist is that we strive to weave tenets of humanism which we hold as 'Manav Dharm,' with the linguistic diversity issue and then put it in perspective. The idea is to look for our roots.

In FMF our endeavor to project Odisha's image at the National and Global level in terms of its rich culture, literature and in particular, Fakir Mohan Senapati's legacy. Since we are based in Delhi, the cultural capital of India, we have the advantage in this regard. Here I can proudly proclaim that I, personally, feel blessed to have got the support of people from various regions of India – from Kanyakumari to Kashmir.

Dilating upon the Manav Dharm issue, I would like to draw the readers' attention to the initials steps that we have

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taken to launch this movement. Our intention is to weave tenets of humanism which we have labeled as Manav Dharm with the linguistic diversity issue and put it in perspective.

A program on 'Manav Dharm' was held under the auspices of Fakir Mohan Foundation and was in collaboration with Jamia Milia Islamia University, New Delhi in April 2013, started with 'Qirat' (recitation from the Quran).

The welcome speech was delivered by Dr. Bulbul Dhar (Director-Sarojini Naidu Centre for Women Studies, Jamia Milia Islamia). She spoke about the ethical notions of humanism and emphasized on the humanist perspective of gender. She extended a warm welcome to Dr. Karan Singh, President ICCR, Member of Rajya Sabha, distinguished guests and all those who were present.

Dr. Monica Das (Managing Trustee of Fakhir Mohan Foundation addressed the audience and presented the concept note of 'Manav Dharm.' Humanism, she elaborated, should come into a pervasive cultural mode and is not just be a program of a small elite. She spoke on the richness of Odiya literature and the contribution of her great – grandfather, Fakir Mohan Senapati, in enriching the literature with his path breaking writings.

He was also an ardent advocate of secular spirit not just through words but action as well. He promoted 'Manav Dharm.' – the religion of humanism. This is central to the FMF agenda. The 'Sarva Dharma Samanyaya Sthambha' that he built stands tall even till date, as a testimony of the secular ideals that he held dear. She implored the audience to revive the humanistic spirit and put an end to the social turbulence. She went on to emphasize the importance of youth in today's scenario in carrying this agenda forward.

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Our next speaker, Dr. Malti, former principal of Janaki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi expressed her opinion on the two exploratory terms – 'Manav and Dharm.' She observed that when 'Dharm' is kept separate, only 'Manavta' or 'Humanism' will emerge. She said that 'Manav Dharm,' 'Manavta' or 'Prativa' becomes redundant unless we keep practicing them in our daily lives.

Her speech was followed by a dance rendition on Baba Farid's poetic composition, by the famed Kathak dancer Malti Shyam. It was a relish to the senses for all the people present in the conference hall. It is in this context one can say that it is through aesthetics that one can open up to humanism.

We were privileged to have Dr. Karan Singh and Dr. S.Y. Quraishi as our keynote speakers. Dr. Karan Singh was glad that Fakir Mohan Senapati, a free and radical thinker, was being honoured in the centre named after Sarojini Naidu, another free thinker and an individualist of her era. Dr. Karan Singh laid stress on the need of humanism in today's scenario. He quoted Swami Vivekananda – 'work not only for one's own self but for the welfare of the world.' He emphasized the great role that modern technology can play in disseminating information for furthering such ideologies. He concluded the speech by saying that India can play an extraordinary role in the world in this respect.

Dr. S.Y. Quraishi (Former Chief Election Commissioner) pointed out in his speech the dichotomy in the preaching and practice of humanism. He said that India is blessed to have a mixed culture, languages, etc. and one should utilise them to the fullest to enjoy the real essence of humanism. He implored the audience to listen to the preaching of the text and not distinguish them on the basis of religion.

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We were honoured to have the company of the eminent religious heads in the conference. I patted myself on my back for having successfully been able to assemble five religious heads from five different religions/faith to speak about humanism (Manav Dharma) on the same platform. I, of course, acknowledge the help, cooperation, and support of my friends in this whole mission. I wish to especially mention the name of Dr. Bulbul Dhar James who was then the director of Women Studies dept in Jamia Milia Islamia. The eminent leaders in faith who were the part of this important dialogue were the following personalitites:

1. Bhikku Sangasena from Ladakh – Buddhism
2. Father Emmanuel Dominic – Director and spokesperson of Delhi Catholic Church – Christianity
3. Pravrajika Shubravataprana – from Ramakrishna Sharda Mission (Women Wing of Ramakrishna Mission) – Hinduism
4. Imam Umar Ahmed Illiyasi – Chief Imam and President of All India Imam Association – Islam
5. Dr. A.K. Basra – Associate Professor of History in University of Delhi – Sikhism

They all spoke eloquently, and our program received wide media coverage and was very well acclaimed by the public.

Media Report below

"Dr. Monica Das (Managing Trustee of Fakir Mohan Foundation addressed the audience and presented the concept note of 'MANAV Dharma.' Humanism, she elaborated should come into a pervasive cultural mode and is not just be a

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program of a small elite. She spoke on the richness of Odiya literature and the contribution of her great-grandfather, Fakir Mohan Senapati, in enriching the literature with his path breaking writings."

Speeches

- *Bhikku Sangsena:* Bhikku Sangsena observed that such gatherings should become more frequent so that people understand the humanistic aspect of every religion. He noted that the founder of every religion must have had the objective of humanism on their mind, but the followers must have failed to interpret that essence in the correct manner. So, one should understand not only our own religion but other religions as well.

- *Father Emmanuel Dominic:* Father Dominic went on to explain how a person can be a very good human being even without being religious. He emphasized the importance of values and principles and the concept of love.

- *Pravrajika Subhavrataprana:* Pravajika Subhavrataprana emphasized the concept of 'Dharma.' 'Dharma' in Mahabharata has been described as advancement and growth of all the creatures. Dharma was declared for preventing other human beings from harm and injury. So, it is something that is capable of upholding the interests of all human beings. She concluded by saying that such approach leads to the path of Humanism.

- *Imam Umar Ahmed Illiyasi:* Imam Illiyasi said that religion must unite people and not divide them. He was of the view that the leaders of each community must come together for a cause and try to unite the fragmented groups that spread hatred or bring about disharmony

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among people belonging to different religious backgrounds. And that is humanism according to him.

- *Dr. A.K. Basra:* Sikkim is a monotheistic religion founded during the 15th century in Punjab region. She explained how Guru Nanak held the ideas of secularism and humanism as something of paramount importance. Dr. A.K. Basra noted that by understanding different religions, we can create a harmonious world of humanism.

It was an extremely vibrant and interactive session. It concluded on the note that humanism is the essence of philosophies and ethical perspectives which the value and agency of human beings.

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CHAPTER 23

The Mission Statement

Mission Statement of Fakir Mohan Foundation – The foundation will work (globally, nationally and in Odisha), to deepen and sharpen people's understanding of the rich socio-cultural roots and identity of its people. The foundation will also aspire to preserve, protect and promote the quintessential character of Odiya language and literature traditions, build social capital and human values among the youth and in particular address women's issues in order to help women emerge as agents of change. The preservation of culture and linguistic diversity in today's world is a major concern to many social scientists, artists, writers, politicians, leaders of linguistic communities and defenders of linguistic human rights.

Moreover, in view of the overwhelming influence of western cultures and the dying use of our mother tongues amongst the youth of today, it is being increasingly observed that the younger generation is losing their cultural/traditional moorings. It is imperative thus to revive their interests in this direction.

The use of English and Hindi have their own importance, due to many reasons other than reasons that are market driven, but to nourish the inner core of humans, promoting the use of regional languages is important and seems to be the call of the

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day. Incidentally, statistics says globally one language dies every fifteen days.

In view of the ongoing debates surrounding culture, language and heritage conservation/preservation, there has been a call for upholding and disseminating knowledge concerning these. Indigenous language is a vital constituent of culture but is under constant threat from external forces. Preservation of language and culture are integral to the issue of promoting our heritage, and language as intangible heritage has its own special place. All this not only builds mutual understanding and respect but also lays the foundation for building peace and security. According to the UN Director General, Irina Bokova:

> "Protecting culture is a security issue. There can be no lasting peace without respect. Attacks against cultural heritage are attacks against the very identity of communities. They mark a symbolic and real step up in the escalation of a conflict, leading to devastation that can be irreparable and whose impact lasts long after the dust has settled."

The core concept of survival is in a major way linked to our cultural survival. If culture/heritage dies, identity dies and with it dies a whole community. It also takes in its sweep, the socio-economic linkages that wither in the process. All this, strangely enough, is somewhere related to our ability of self-expression through our spoken word – our language – our mother tongue. To quote Noam Chomsky, a renowned philosopher, and sociologist, "a language is not just words; it is a culture, a tradition, a whole history that creates what a community is. It is all embodied in a language." Cultural dissonance can impede the general development of students is an acknowledged fact. This is an important matter to reckon with, concerning the issue in hand.

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The value of cultural and linguistic maintenance in a plural society is not simply an ideological position. It is based on pragmatic considerations as well. Of late it is increasingly felt by the management dons that, the fact that economic development has cultural dimensions has to be reckoned with and the more seriously it is taken, the more will be the economic dividends for the society, In fact, many of the Economic policy practitioners in International financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF have begun to look towards cultural factors as key variables explaining successful transition strategies... (Managing Trustee Dr. Monica Das' interview with the Times of India has gone into greater details concerning this).

Coming to the question of education in India, it is common knowledge that universal education is still a far cry. Gender inequity is very clearly observed in education as well. As for girls, 53% in the age group of 5-9 are illiterate. Leave aside general education even language education is in a deplorable state.

Talking of specifics concerning language education and citing one case that of Odisha as an instance, the situation is rather distressing. This despite the fact that Odiya is one of the six classical languages of India. Interestingly enough Odisha is the first state in India to have been established on the basis of language. The findings brought out by an organisation called ASER, says that in Odisha only 33% of children who are in the education process use the Odisha language. The 70% and odd do not use it. Hence, the teaching of Oriya language needs to be taken up in right earnest. Similar is the condition in many states of India. Going by global statistics one language in the world dies every fortnight. Various research/survey books have come up with findings that the use of regional languages in their respective regions is dwindling. There is a need to develop and

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implement appropriate tools/aids for imparting language skills in view of its progressively diminishing use of it in different regions. In the state of Odisha, the population constitutes 1/3 of tribal communities which further compounds the problem. They do not use the Odiya language and hence have lost out on various fronts. That, of course, does not mean to say that their own tribal languages should not be used. Language is synchretic and is more than just words. And mastering multiple languages is not a difficult task especially when they are taught in the early stages. Historically Odiya is one of the oldest and developed languages of India. It has suffered neglect and calls for immediate measures to save it from further decadence.

FMF mainly draws its inspiration from Fakir Mohan Senapati's legacy, his struggle to save the Odiya language from extinction, the story of how he succeeded in that and gave all Odiyas their identity and his 'Sarva Dharma Samanyaya Stambh,' the pillar of religious tolerance. FMF, after being established in the year 2011 (13th January), a souvenir was brought out on the occasion of the first mega cultural event that was organised in the Stein auditorium of India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi. People were of the opinion that the souvenir was of very high qualitative content and had wide circulation. It was sponsored by Government of Odisha's Tourism Department.

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CHAPTER 24

Some Known, Unknown & Little-Known Facts

Apart from other things, I had prepared a Trivia (little known facts) on Fakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918), which I am presenting below for the reader's benefit. It was published in the souvenir of Fakir Mohan Foundation first released in India Habitat Center, New Delhi in 2011.

- Known as Vyasa Kavi because of the vast expanse of his writings in different genres. Some however attribute this sobriquet to his endeavor in translating the Mahabharata into Odia.
- He has translated the Mahabharata, the Geeta, the Ramayana and Boudhavatar Kavya into simple Odia verse.
- Was originally named Braja Mohan Senapati. Due to his chronic ill health was dedicated by his grandmother Kuchila Devi, to the Fakirs in his childhood and thereafter was named Fakir Mohan Senapati.

  Is known as 'Sankranti Purush' because he was born on Makar Sankranti in the month of January and died on Raja Sankranti in the month of June.

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Though from a well-to-do family – was brought up in penury.

Was self-made with very little formal education

Was Dewan in many princely states in Odisha during the British regime

Mr. John Beams who was the British Head for Odisha – A Civil Servant had a special fondness for Fakir Mohan.

Fakir Mohan and John Beams used to engage in intellectual and literary discussions often.

John Beams had taken Fakir Mohan's help in preparing certain portions of his book titled 'Indo-Aryan Language' (Three volumes in 1872-1879).

Fakir Mohan's association with some British civil servant like Halem, John Beams and others helped Fakir Mohan Senapati to push forward his case for making Odiya a separate official language.

Fakir Mohan Senapati had to fight against various odds for achieving his goal.

Finally, he succeeded and Odiya was acknowledged and bestowed with its own identity.

Odiyas today owe their identity to this tireless effort made primarily by Fakir Mohan Senapati. Gauri Shankar Ray and many others had joined the movement.

Orissa, now Odisha was the first state in India to be established on the basis of language.

John Boulton, an Englishman, and a professor, in SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies), London did

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his Ph.D. on 'Fakir Mohan Senapati.' This Ph.D. thesis was published by Sahitya Akademi, Odisha.

John Boulton also translated Fakir Mohan Senapati's autobiography and titled it as 'My Life & Times.'

Padma Vibhusan awardee Shri Sitakant Mohapatra terms Fakir Mohan's autobiography as 'a novel by itself'.

Shri Sisir Das, the well-known linguist, and Professor, wrote the History of Indian Literature. It has been published in 3 volumes by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. Here Shri Sisir Das informs that Fakir Mohan Senapati is the pioneer in India in the field of novel writing on social realism.

Fakir Mohan Senapati is also among the pioneer short story writers of India. His short story eponymous 'Rebati' is a trail blazer. The theme has immense contemporary relevance.

Professor Rich Shwedar professor of Chicago University has spoken about on Fakir Mohan Senapati and comparative world literature in the film made on Fakir Mohan Senapati.

Professor Namwar Singh, a preeminent littérateur has spoken elaborately on Fakir Mohan Senapati's 'Chhamana Atha Guntha' in the introduction of the film 'Anvesan' prepared by Doordarshan and directed by Dr. Monica Das. Professor Singh has made interesting remarks and has narrated humorous anecdotes on the cow 'Neta' featuring in 'Chhaman Atha Guntha.' He has compared Premchand's writings particularly 'Godan' with Fakir Mohan's Chhamana Atha Guntha. He has

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compared Chekov's literature with Fakir Mohan Senapati's writing.

Fakir Mohan Senapati's humour is what stands out in his writings. This perhaps holds a special appeal for the masses.

He was essentially a people's man & 'Six Acres & a Third' brings out the sufferings of the less privileged & the deprived in a very vivid manner. His 'Utkal Bhramana' is a longish poem has where he has criticized certain religion practices without hurting religious sentiments.

Fakir Mohan's 'Chhamana Atha Guntha' (Six Acres & a Third) has been published by Penguin recently and has been titled as 'Six Acres & a Third.' Professors from Cornell University, USA have translated the text.

His writings on women also have tremendous contemporary relevance.

A special issue on Fakir Mohan Senapati was brought out by EPW (Economic & Political Weekly) where one of the articles was on the gender angle in his writings.

An international Conference was organised in Delhi, by Delhi University and Developing Countries Research Centre.

His strong secular beliefs had their reflection in his way of life besides being reflected in his writings.

During the 'Naanka Durbhiksha' (the great famine of Odisha) he upheld the spirit of the Christians in helping the poor the dying and the destitute, and in the process,

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Fakir Mohan Senapati invited the wrath of the Hindus but remained undeterred.

Fakir Mohan Senapati was a secular writer and thinker who had built the 'Sarva Dharma Samanya' pillar (all religion unity / tolerance pillar) which stands tall in Shanti Kanan, Balasore, Odisha even to this day. It has representations of all beliefs Hinduisms, Islam, Buddhism, etc.

His poems though less talked about have immense value and were on a variety of topics including topics concerning children's literature.

His poem written on his grandmother is heart rending.

The poem written on the daughter-in-law Heera Prabha, who had nursed in back to health after a major illness is indeed very touching.

He had accidentally swallowed sulphuric acid and was on the brink of death. He emerged like a Phoenix to continue to write more.

His 'Boudhavatar Kavya' is something with is soul stirring and again has contemporary relevance in view of the increasing fan following of the Buddhist philosophy in recent times.

Fakir Mohan Senapati is not only hailed as the father of Modern Odiya literature but also a trail blazer in the field of Indian literature and thought.

Picador published "Anthology of Indian Writing (Year 2001)" has Professor Jatin Naik's book titled 'Story of My Life' based on Fakir Mohan Senapati's autobiography.

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He is known as Vyasa Kavi because of the vast expanse of his writings in different genres.

His contribution by way of bringing in the first printing press to Odisha is something which shows his entrepreneurial ability and above all his undying passion for Odiya language, its survival, promotion & propagation.

He was an able administrator in his capacity as Dewan, a litterateur and above all a humanist.

He had embraced Christianity & Brahmoism. His beliefs on Hinduism notwithstanding.

The DVD 'Anvesan' produced by Doordarshan Archives & directed by Dr. Monica Das has recorded all the above facts. It is available for purchase at Doordarshan Archives / Prasar Bharti.

We are highly grateful to the then Director General Doordarshan Dr. S.Y. Quaraishi, the erstwhile the Chief Election Commissioner, who realised the value of the project on Fakir Mohan Senapati since he is also a man of letters himself. Dr. Quaraishi helped with the sponsorship from Doordarshan for the film 'Anvesan,' and hence the life and works of Fakir Mohan Senapati could be documented for posterity and for all the world to view the remarkable contribution made by this man called Fakir Mohan. Incidentally, Dr. Quaraishi, former chief Election Commissioner, of India, describes Fakir Mohan Senapati as the 'Ghalib' of Odisha.

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Press Reports

Hindustan Times Group: Fri, 02 Aug 2013

Fakir Mohan Senapati has been long considered the father of Modern Oriya Literature. Chha Mana Atha Guntha features as a selection of his best work. He is the man credited with fanning the resurgence that led to the formation of India's first linguistic state, the man feted as the father of modern Oriya literature. Yet, Fakir Mohan Senapati's home here lies neglected, and the garden he so lovingly tended has been vandalized. His legacy is being whittled away, lament researchers, remembering the contribution of Fakir Mohan, or Vyasakabi as he was known to modern-day Odisha society.

"Mo mattrubhasa mote Shrestha" (My mother tongue is best for me), wrote Vyasakabi, who lived from 1843 to 1918. The words were the stepping stones to Odisha becoming India's first linguistic state in 1936 and Vyasakabi one of the architects of Oriya renaissance.

But if his house in Mallikashpur village of Balasore district, 200 km from the state capital Bhubaneswar, is anything to go by, the sense of pride he instilled has long been forgotten.

In a bitter irony, his home had been lying in a dilapidated condition for long before it was reconstructed and converted some years ago into a library and a museum – but not in his memory. It has changed beyond recognition and houses a few statues of some gods but nothing to indicate that it is Vyasakabi's house.

"The renovation of the house, which comes under the culture department, itself speaks about incompetence. Those who have little knowledge about conservation changed its original characteristics and the design of its roof, doors and the façade," pointed out heritage researcher Prasanta Kumar Padhi.

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"The central courtyard has Cuddapah tiles that were never used in Fakir Mohan's time. Water seepage is visible in many places," he added.

Literature lovers have demanded that the house be converted into a museum in his memory by collecting memorabilia associated with Vyasakabi, similar to the work being carried out to conserve Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's house in Oriya Bazar, Cuttack.

The garden tells a similar tale of neglect. Shantikanan, the garden he built and in which he penned some of his works, has been vandalised. The original engravings are gone and in its place are written graffiti.

The Balasore civic authorities had acquired three acres of land from Fakir Mohan's granddaughter with financial assistances from the Fakir Mohan Smruti Committee and Fakir Mohan Sahitya Parishad.

"But leaving only one acre for Fakir Mohan's memory, a primary school and a housing colony have been constructed by the municipality. All the while the Fakir Mohan Sahitya Parishad has been searching for a piece of land to do something for his memory," Harischandra Behera, President of the Parishad, told IANS.

"Though a gardener was appointed to take care of the garden, none is present to take care of it. It is only a safe place for anti-social elements now," he alleged.

Noted poet Brajnath Rath said there had been a longstanding demand to declare Santinikanan and the house as tourist spots but the state tourism department has shown no willingness for that.

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"Though discussions in this regard with the tourism director have reached a final stage, it is yet to be implemented," said Rath.

Balasore Collector Alekh Chandra Padhiary said a proposal to declare Santinikanan a tourist place was underway.

Journal of Literature, Culture and Media Studies Vol.-I Number 2 Winter July-December 2009

Odiya Literary Culture in The World traditions – G K Das

The literary culture of any region or nation is shaped by its literature, oral and written. It may be limited to a specific location, but the literature on which it is grounded has no frontiers. No literature, writer or literary text is limited to a local context or culture. A literary artifact or author worth the name has a universal status. Homer, Dante, Sarala Das, Shakespeare, Fakir Mohan Senapati, Rabindranath Thakur, Kuntala Kumari Sabat, or Basant Kumari Patnik is a world author. That is not just a contemporary viewpoint; Marx also thought so. According to him, "The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and form the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature." With the emergence of a global view in the postcolonial ethos, the contemporary reader is more than ever inclined, to take such an enlightened view of all literatures of the world work of countless gifted women and men. On the Indian scene, there were novelists of no lesser stature. Writers like Bankim Chandra, Fakir Mohan Senapati, Sarat Chandra, Bibhuti Bandhopadhyaya, Prem Chand, Phanishwar Nath Renu, Manu Bhandari, Gopinath Mohanty, Basant Kumari Patnaik, Mahasweta Devi, and Pratibha Ray are only a few among the distinguished authors, whose works have closely reflected the

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complex nature of contemporary literary culture. Their contribution to the increasing understanding of the human relationships and human values across cultures was significantly instrumental in opening up new windows to the world. In this respect, a revolutionary Odiya novel like Fakir Mohan Senapati's 'Chha Mana Atha Guntha' (Six Acres and a Third), or Gopinath Mohanty's Paraja is of the status of a global classic as an astute critique of colonial Odisha/ India, as D.H. Lawrence's 'Sons and Lovers' or 'The Rainbow' is as a critique of industrial Britain.

The Hindu: April 6, 2013

One Moment, Two Lives

A writer considers the wisdom (or folly) of looking for truth in autobiographies, given the reactions to Gandhi's 'My Experiments with Truth' and Fakir Mohan Senapati's 'The Story of My Life.'

I was just a few inches behind him. The bullets missed me by inches. Somebody in the crowd may have said, 'hey Ram' or 'Aiyo.' I don't know. But I don't think he said, 'hey Ram.' V. Kalyanam, Gandhi's personal secretary (The Hindu January 31, 2013)

In 1927, two autobiographies appeared: one was the first volume of Gandhi's 'Atmakatha' or Autobiography in Gujarati; the second one was by a relatively obscure (in the pan-Indian context) Odia writer, Fakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918). As is well-known, Gandhi's autobiography had first appeared in parts in the Gujarati journal, 'Navjivan' before making its appearance in book form in 1927. What is not so well-known is that Fakir Mohan's posthumously published autobiography, 'Atmajivancharita' or 'The Story of My Life' had already been excerpted in parts and serialised in different Odia journals before his son Mohini Mohan expurgated and published it in

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1927. It is the first-ever Odia autobiography in the European sense of the term. The unexpurgated version has now been put together both in Odia and a wholly new English translation by the NBT. Many have expressed the view that Mahadev Desai's English translation of Gandhi's autobiography is not a happy one.

Gandhi's autobiography begins with his admission that, initially reluctant, he agreed to write the story of his life at the behest of some of his nearest co-workers four or five years ago. Fakir Mohan uncannily begins in a similar vein "For the last four or five years, a few friends and some educated young men who are like my sons have been urging me to set down the story of my life. I find it hard to ignore their requests." Both finally agree to go ahead with the task, but reluctantly and not without some self-doubt: Fakir Mohan about the lack of the necessary skill on his part, and also the absence of important events in his life. Gandhi's reluctance is induced by a "God-fearing" friend. Fakir Mohan undertakes the task aware of the newest of the genre: "I am certain that this sacred motherland of ours will see many autobiographers in the near future; I am merely laying the foundation for them to build on." I should perhaps mention here that Fakir Mohan also wrote one of the earliest Odia novels and the first Odia short story, and the statement above is an indication of the author's self-consciousness about the pioneering role he was playing; the motherland is question being the then emergent modern linguistic state of Odisha or Utkal. Gandhi's hesitation could well have sprung from his awareness that writing about oneself was foreign to the culture he was writing in.

Though both narratives begin with a deep sense of communal affiliation, whereas in the case of Fakir Mohan it stays that way all through, in the case of Gandhi, beginning with

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his sense of belonging to a Gujarati, Vaishnavite Bania community, his narrative quickly moves into an ever-expanding political and communal sphere, from the particular self to a transcendental self, so that he cannot be pinned down to any communal identity if looked at from the perspective of higher truth that he experiments with. Fakir Mohan begins and ends his story with his sense of belonging to the Odia community. Being an Odia, he wants the reader to see the history of Odisha through his eyes.

The Hindu: Sunday, Mar 04, 2007

Reading the Indian Novel

Himansu S. Mohapatra

A comment on a recently held International Conference in Delhi.

INDIAN novels are best read from the multiple perspectives of translations, comparative literature, and critical theory. Translation – and specifically translation into English – ensures the text's existence as a pan-Indian, though not a unified, object. Comparative studies further diversify the putative unity of the nation. The critical theory proposes interpretative paradigms with which to shift literary boundaries. An international conference titled "The Literary View from Below," held in Delhi (January 3-5, 2007) brought the three perspectives to bear on Fakir Mohan Senapati's Oriya novel Chha Mana Atha Guntha. Well heralded by a special interpretative section in the EPW (November 2006), it was organised by the DCRC, Delhi University, FMS Project, USA and the South Asian Program, Cornell University.

At the heart of the rehabilitating exercise is the recovery of Senapati's amazing first novel through a cross-cultural and collaborative translation project. The English translation, while

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fraught with deep irony given the text's critique of the Raj, is also indispensable. The English-speaking world ought to know the depth and dimension of the "othering" that the British Rule perpetrated in Odisha in the 19th century. Conversely, all of us can learn from the unusually rich critique of social power in all its forms that Senapati's novel articulates. The critique permits the story of colonial modernity to be told differently.

Central Question

The two panel discussions that flanked the conference addressed the central question of language in Indian literature. Senapati's novel, panelists such as Namwar Singh, Harish Trivedi, Manoranjan Mohanty, G.K. Das and Chaman Lal (Delhi), Amiya Dev (Kolkata), V. Narayan Rao and Satya P. Mohanty (U.S.) argued, was a play on languages. While Namwar Singh resisted the Bakhtinian implications of this thesis, all agreed that the novel could be read as a cautionary account of the process whereby a rich heteroglossia was giving way to an impoverished monolingualism, designated by the nationalist shift to the concept of the mother tongue.

Senapati's novel fitted perfectly into Rao's scheme of looking further back than the 19th century for a vision of an Indian literature without linguistic borders, a theme that Kavita Panjabi, drawing on her Sindhi background, later echoed. To Rao the novel along with Gurujada's Telugu play "Kanyasulkam", a new English rendering of which is dues out shorty from Indiana University Press, was crucial to a quest for an alternative modernity, premised not on reform, as in Bankim and Tagore, but on a playful parody of all forms of domination. Satya P. Mohanty reiterated the theme during the closing panel. He further outlined the epistemic dimensions of the parody and

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satire employed in Senapati's novel by showing how they irradiated the view from below.

The four sessions of the conference demonstrated the triad of rubrics guiding the deliberations. Under the interpretative rubric Ananta Giri of the Madras Institute of Development Studies, Sachidnanda Mohanty of the University of Hyderabad and Diptiranjan Pattnaik of Utkal University, read the decolonising agenda of the novel in terms as different as "transformative critique", "narrative irony" and a form of non-engagement best described as "upanishadic."

The same interpretative lens focused on gender elicited sharply polarised views on Senapati's construction of woman. Bidyut Mohanty, Savita Singh, and Yashodhara Mishra dwelt on Senapati's breaking of the feminine mystique through the projection of the stronger woman. Pragati Mahapatra, however, saw signs of a new patriarchy in Senapati's holding on to the angel-witch polarity.

If a central issue in translation studies is a local cultural adaptation, then Senapati's novel just exemplifies this. It not only travels across languages but it also freely mistranslates in an effort to localise. G.J.V. Prasad of JNU traced this pervasive practice as far as the ancient Tamil text, 'Tolkapiyam,' where it exists under the name, "mori-preyarti." The name catches the spirit if not the letter of translation as the is understood today. It refers to "Tamilakam," the "infusion of the Tamil spirit into a deserving text", something that serves as an analogue for Senapati's "oriyanising." Sudish Pachauri of University of Delhi ably showed that this quality carried across by reading from Nawalpuri's 1959 Hindi Translation of the novel.

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Treatment of Law

The comparative rubric positioned Senapati's novel vis-à-vis Hemachandra Barua's 'Bahar Ransang Bhitare Kuabhaduri,' Kashibai Kantikar's 'Rangroo' and Prem Chand's 'Godaan.' Tillottama Mishra highlighted the similarity between Barua and Senapati in the matter of the treatment of law. Meera kosambi and Himansu Mohapatra emphasized the difference. The former made a case for the "reformist realism" of the first Marathi woman writer as opposed to the satiric realism of Senapati. The latter provided a differentiated analysis of realism, pitting the epistemic achievement of Senapati against the panoramic psychodrama of Premchand.

The conference, a fitting scholarly tribute to an exceptional creative work, thus set a new benchmark in comparative literature studies, even as it restored the Indian novel to them multilingual ethos in which it revels.

Sachinanda Mohanty: Senapati and Colonial Modernity

Muse India, Literary Criticism and "The Literary View from Below: Fakir Mohan Senapati's 'Six Acres and a Third' and Radical Social Critique in Modern South Asian Literature," international conference, Developing Countries Research Centre (DCRC), University of Delhi, January 3-5, 2007.

Genealogy of Ownership, Social Capital and Colonial Modernity in Fakir Mohan Senapati's 'Six Acres and a Third'.

The moral universe of Fakir Mohan Senapati's magisterial Chha Mana Atha Guntha (Six Acres and a Third) is defined by a critique of a social capital and colonial modernity in the 19th Century Odisha.

Varied sources are seen to constitute the origin and growth of this capital. Access to beliefs, legends, folklores and historical

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memory are some of them. And yet land and landholdings remain central to understanding this process. They are the most obvious reference points in the novel. They define and uphold the very material conditions that underlie the work as a fictional artifact.

Six Acres and a Third is a foundational text precisely for this reason. It is a moral allegory whose significance goes beyond the tragic tale of Saria and Bhagia, the loss of their meager holdings and worldly possessions usurped by a cruel Zamindar. It is not just a poignant study of avarice and social villainy typified in the character of Ramachandra Mangaraj and his evil associate Champa. But the tale's strength and uniqueness lie in the manner in which the narrative brings in political specificity perhaps the first of its kind in colonial India. While others can invoke a more rigorous economic analysis, my task in this essay is primarily to study the narration of the genealogy of land holding that unfolds in the narrative. To do so, I shall look at specific novelistic situations, chapter divisions including the use of specific chapter headings. I shall also examine the role of the intrusive and self-conscious narrator and the use of irony that are seen as integral to the authorial mission.

The narrative vision is refracted through historical memory and prism of competing colonialisms: the Brahmin, the Marathas, the Moghuls and the British. The idea here is not to blur the differences between the varied forms of inequity and offer a reading of the novel a historically as a latter-day moral tale. Rather, I wish to draw attention to a host of complex contextual factors such as colonial education, ownership rights, "sunset laws", famine administration and language politics – all of which separately and together – make this work a unique study of colonial rule in India.

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The conference, a fitting scholarly tribute to exceptionally creative work, thus set a new benchmark in comparative literature studies, even as it restored the Indian novel to them multilingual ethos in which it revels.

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CHAPTER 25

Fakir Mohan Foundation – Initiatives and the Road Ahead

So far as the current activities of the foundation are concerned, we have launched a workshop program for the youth and have been conducting sessions in different educational institutions, pan Odisha. The update is available on the website www.fakirmohanfoundation.com

The core concept of the workshop is to highlight through literature those socio-economic and cultural concerns, that often become manifest as menacing problems in today's world.

The idea is to arouse consciousness amongst the youth regarding these, through the medium of literature. Below is the structure of the workshop in Odiya laid out along the above lines and referring to Fakir Mohan's writings.

The fund of knowledge in our rich literary heritage can be creatively put to use in building consciousness in the young and sensitising them so as to help them address the menacing issues in their own creative manner.

Literature here acts as a vehicle or medium for propagating knowledge about the crucial socio-

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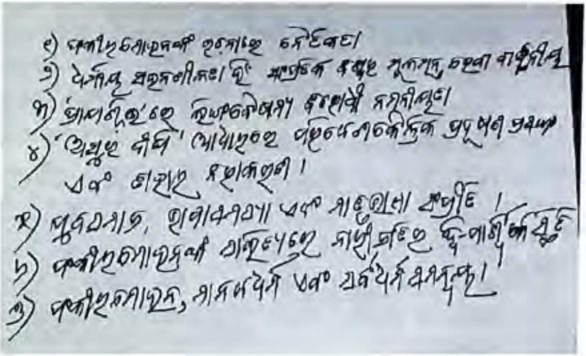
economic and cultural issues that concern our life and living.



The workshops held in Odisha on the interface of socio-economic and moral issues with literature. The above briefly states the important points in Odia

Literature can very adeptly soft pedal these issues to make our life more pleasurable.

The issues would be interfaced with literature and culture.

What is needed today is a means of harmonising the qualities of the head with powers of the heart. There is an ever-increasing state of chaos in the world; tension increases daily in the individual, in social life, in national affairs, and international relations. The great and urgent need is for something to reestablish harmony in the individual human being and to give him peace; only from such an inner peace can wisdom and happiness be born.

Management gurus of the world today are increasingly trying to interface cultural teachings in their curriculum.

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The endless fact gathering must utterly fail to satisfy the real needs of man. Happiness is when man's inner spiritual and outer material glories are brought into harmony. Life gets integrated and becomes truly worth living.

Youth is wasted on the young. – Bernard Shaw

Demographic Dividend

India has more than 50% of its population below the age of 25 and more than 65% below the age of 35. It is expected that, in 2020, the average age of an Indian will be 29 years, compared to 37 for China and 48 for Japan; and, by 2030, India's dependency ratio should be just over 0.4.

Population of 1.25 billion 125 crores out of which 83 crores below 35 – What a potential for nation building.

Tradition reinforces values and helps to build a cohesive society.

Traditions define us shapes us. If we ignore our literary traditions, we are in danger of damaging the underpinning of our identity.

"A language is not just words, it's a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community, a whole history that creates what a community is. It's all embodied in a language." – Naom Chomsky

"To be ignorant of what occurred of before you were born is to remain always a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history." – Cicero, Quator (46 BC)

What ails the present world? – Look what's happening around us – look what's happening in Syria. Look at

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North Korea and many other places. Look at Kashmir so on and so forth. An idealism crisis is leading to it.

Environmental climate change mitigation the global pact for 2020. Preventing the global temperature by 1.5 degrees. It would health benefits in India up to $8.4 trillion and in China to $ 3.3 trillion.

Young India

Gender sensitisation – A new McKinsey Global Institute report finds that $12 trillion could be added to global GDP by 2025 by advancing women's equality. The public, private, and social sectors will need to act to close gender gaps in work and society.

Cherish, Nurture, Enable

Protect, Preserve, Promote – Fakir Mohan Foundation's three watchwords.

Words and ideas can go a long way in healing the mind and nurturing the soul. Great works of litterateurs have been for ages inspiring humanity. It is on this fund of wisdom that people have been brought up for many-many years. In the turbulent world of today what is needed is to polish the core of humans and help them to develop sense and sensibility. For this to happen, the flowchart below shows the way.

We are what our thoughts have made us; so, take care about what you think. Words are secondary. Thoughts live; they travel far. – Vivekananda

The world is never the same once a good poem has been added to it. – Dylan Thomas

Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of mind to think. – Albert Einstein

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CHAPTER 26

Some Reflections

I feel proud of my Fakir Mohan lineage and consider myself fortunate to have got initiated into the Senapati cultural legacy. I received an upbringing with liberal doses of idealism, a multi-cultural exposure and correct values thrown in good measure. I may not have achieved a lot in my life, in the conventional sense of the term, however, I consider myself an achiever in the sense of having led a fairly fulfilling life, especially from the point of view of reaching out to people belonging to different strata of society through my career, work and otherwise. This reminds me about my work as NSS (National Service Scheme) officer in the affiliated college of Delhi University, where I taught for thirty-seven years. This assignment which I had taken up voluntarily gave me an opportunity to mingle with people from the less privileged section of the society. It certainly gave me some revealing insights into real life. Through my work along with my students in the slums of Delhi, I learnt lessons of humility and being down to earth. My NSS assignment gave me an opportunity to work in the blind school, Lodhi Road and also in Cheshire home, Okhla Road, New Delhi, besides at some rehabilitation camps in some parts of Delhi. All this was indeed a learning experience for me.

I am thankful to the Almighty to have given me this opportunity which in fact I feel has taken care of some of my angularities of nature. With all this, now I am somewhat

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equipped to reach out to people and embrace humanity. Life springs up various surprises. Apart from a host of pleasant and unpleasant surprises in my life, the most memorable and life changing was my encounter with the Soka-Gakkai International (SGI) version of Buddhism. This encounter has redefined life for me. Value creation in society with the youth at the centre, is its main mission. Since my husband and I have to some extent dedicated ourselves to it, we would like to encourage the youth in great numbers to take to this mission in a big way.

In the course of my travel to various parts of the world in connection with my work/ career as well as a normal tourist, I have rediscovered myself through interactions with all sorts of people from various nations of the world. Incidentally, my first exposure to the western world as a professional was when I was invited by a French lady who was the director of Women's Studies department in the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. I had never applied to the University, but strangely enough, the invitation reached me out of the blue. Maybe I was spotted on the net. I went there for three months as a visiting scholar, and my total expenses were borne by them. The experience was out of this world. It was a total eye opener for me. It was quite a culture shock, no doubt in the beginning, when I found myself surrounded with so many white – skinned people all around. However I soon made myself at home and even invited my cousin to come and see me. My son and daughter-in-law, incidentally were in Portland then, came over to Vancouver to help me with my house – hunting. In the course of this exercise, I got wonderful exposures to a culture which was so different from my own. I discovered to myself; that despite the vast differences, people share certain common traits. That is perhaps what helps people to gel with one another partially though.

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Visiting my children who live abroad has been an annual feature for the last seventeen years. I have visited wonderful places in Europe, Mount Titlis in Switzerland, the pebbled beaches in France, Shakespeare's house, Stratford-upon-Avon in England, Italy and Rome. In the USA, Las Vegas, Grand Canyon, Crater lake in Oregon, Yellowstone National Park in Idaho, different places in Canada including Niagara Falls. Also, China, Hong Kong, Beijing, Australia, and Dubai which has amazing marvels of engineering. The list, however, is not comprehensive. This exposure goes without saying, was enriching to the core.

The reason for giving an account of my travels is that it makes me wonder why after having seen so much of the world one still feels a tug at one's heart strings with the mention of the Bakhrabad house, where I spent my childhood days. I wonder whether it is the 'Memes,' (an element of a culture or system of behavior passed from one individual to another by imitation or other non-genetic means) which does the trick. It could also be the indelible imprint on the mind that one gets as a child. As they say, the first ten years of life of a child are the most impressionable years of one's life. The mind which is fed with various cultural, emotional and educational inputs stays there for good. It stays with even good effect when the information is fed tenderly by the caring people around you.

Penning this down gives me the feeling of being an alien in the present-day world, especially for one like me who has been more or less untouched by the ultra-modern ways of working and thinking. I am still ancient in that sense. Sentiments and emotions are at a discount now, in these days of modern technology and fast paced development. To mention some mind-boggling developments – Bluetooth, Nano technology, Cloud technology DNA mapping, Genetic coding, Robotics,

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Artificial Intelligence, editing of Genome of human embryos or what have you. There is however no denying the fact, that all these have tremendous importance in the modern-day context. All this has revolutionised the world and redefined human existence. The disconcerting fact here, is the case of an information implosion linked to it. Along with this, we have massacres of the worst kind, terrorism, chemical war fare, global warming, mounting suicidal rates amongst youth under thirty-five, atrocities on women of the horrendous kind. Besides, what about the impending water wars? The air-pollution that is already threatening man's very existence? In short, the basics of life is being denied to man. Man is in a tizzy and isn't he all set to negate himself?

Leave aside other things, talking about the alarming air-pollution levels, in the home home-terrain-India, the air pollution is reaching dangerous levels by the day. Isn't it time we wake up and act immediately. I feel very strongly about the cause. The gravity of the situation can be borne out from the following facts:

Air pollution affects all regions of the world. However, populations in low-income cities are the most impacted. According to the latest air quality database, 97% of cities in low- and middle-income countries with more than 100,000 inhabitants do not meet WHO air quality guidelines. However, in high-income countries, that percentage decreases to 49%. (source: WHO Global Ambient Air Quality Database, update 2018).

According to the reports of World Health Organisation (WHO), more than 90% of the Indian population is exposed to dangerous levels of pollution and all 40 of the world's most polluted cities are in India.

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Exposure to polluted air directly impacts our respiratory system and causes several chronic diseases. Bronchitis, emphysema, asthma and lung cancer being some of the most common among them. Every 3rd child in India is suffering from chronic respiratory disease. Pollution contributes to premature mortality and is the cause for over 10% of all Indian deaths every year.

According to WHO guidelines, Annual Mean for PM2.5 concentration should be less than 10 µg/m3 while 24-hr Mean for PM2.5 concentration should be less than 25 µg/m3. But the reality of Indian cities can be estimated merely by the fact that our pollutants concentration is always at least 10-20 times of this standard. Moreover, on festive nights, when fireworks are involved, this concentration can reach up to 800 µg/m3 and at some places it can even cross the 1000 µg/m3 mark which is roughly around 50 times of daily standards and 100 times of average annual standards.

It is but imperative to address these maladies to save our souls. There is no denying the fact that man has created all this mess. Man is at the centre of all actions. His actions are shaped by his thoughts, and thoughts take birth in him through his exposure to influences around him, the most important being his conscience fed by knowledge. Literature is what creates knowledge. Good literature would create good knowledge, this in turn would cultivate good thoughts and thoughts would lead to action. So, coming to think of it, the root cause is the way people think. If this thinking can be a positive direction, things would be remedied as desired. In the face of all this madness that is around us today, it is the cultural moorings that can help to breed sanity. The core content of human beings needs to be protected and nourished. I wish to quote here Stanley Knick (Traditional Culture and Modern Culture: Man's Fall from

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Grace) who is a professor in Anthropology at Indiana University, USA. He writes, "While traditional and modern culture may be similar in some ways, in some very significant ways they are clearly different from each other. Traditional culture, such as our human ancestors enjoyed, is held together by relationships among people – immediate family, extended family, clan and tribe."

Modern culture is mutable. It is concerned with power and things. It is about information and knowledge. Traditional culture goes beyond knowledge to the level of wisdom and understanding. It is about people and relationships. Aren't people the most important? Hence, I feel, for the sake of securing sanity of the human species, tangible as well as intangible heritage, which are repositories of traditional culture, should be preserved protected and propagated at all costs.

The other day I was watching on television a panel discussion on what is meant by development. I was glad that a particular luminary echoed my thoughts when he said, "too much of development after a point of time becomes counterproductive". I wish to add here that productivity apart from ensuring welfare, if it can generally push up the happiness quotient of people, it would be indicative enough of productivity leading to prosperity in real terms. Besides, more than CSR (corporate social responsibility) I wish to state that it is HSR (human social responsibility) which should be promoted for sustainable peace and brotherhood and more. It is after all the happiness quotient that is of paramount importance.

The world today offers creature comforts but burdens you with mind boggling blues that leaves you unnerved and confounded in the worst possible manner. What with the impending rule of the robots? Soon the futuristic gadgets will

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leave man totally negated. The day will not be far when robots will rule our lives. Isn't the dynamics of change taking us too far? Humans are oblivious to the fact. Isn't it time we go back into God again. Enjoying nature, humanism, literature, music and indulge in the culinary delights, relish and pamper the palate and just enjoy the life in each other's company, in good measure.

Can a trade-off be possible at this juncture, where one is driven down a whirlpool of change of a very high velocity. The answer is yes. The saving grace in the midst of this madness, if I may say so, is that one can still salvage one's being and ward off the overwhelming influences by trying to enjoy the simple pleasures of life. Though, it is easier said than done yet not impossible.

A good life is one which is guided by knowledge and inspired by love. Says Bertrand Russel. Knowledge now is of high order no doubt, but wisdom is what is lacking. Along with it, love between fellow humans steadily the wane. I wish to take the legacy of Fakir Mohan to benefit society and its people and the youth in particular to have a heightened happiness quotient. A lot is being done to promote literature which indeed is commendable but what use is literature without imbuing the spirit inherent in those letters and putting it into practice to nourish the inner core of humans. I wish that the children of today are imbued with the values of life and get to know their heritage, learn to speak up for what is right and get to instill a sense of pride in themselves. Knowledge which most often leads to wisdom is of essence here, and knowledge can be best gathered through reading and going through wholesome literature.

I have come in contact with the best of people, in a way the crème-de-la-crème of India, and to some extent

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internationally as well, by dint of my association with International Association for Economics (IAFFE). I have had the good fortune to hand my book on the girl child to none other than the great Amartya Sen whom I met in Oxford, also to Abdul Kalam President of India, apart from Sonia Gandhi and others.

Additionally, my preoccupation with gender studies started in Vancouver (mentioned earlier on). I came of age so far as feminist studies is concerned with my regular visits abroad to deliver lectures at various universities, mostly under the auspices of International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE). I have presented papers at several Universities such as, American University, Washington DC, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada, Portland State University, Oregon, USA, Ram Kheng University Bangkok, the University of Boston, Massachusetts, University of Stanford, Berlin School of Economics and Law, Berlin, Germany, Hawke Institute, University of South Australia and Conference held in Hangzhou, China. All this gave me a maturity and deeper insight into issues concerning the girl child, women and gender relations. I drew my inspiration from all this and started working on books. Below are the details concerning my two books. The first one was on the girl child in India.

To be specific, the title of the above-mentioned book is 'Her Story so far – Tales of the girl child in India' (published by Penguin). This book, fortunately, has received wide acclaim. The Government of India through the Institute of English & foreign languages (IEFL) distributed two hundred copies of this book to prestigious institutes of India including IITs. I was also invited to speak on this book at the University of Adelaide, Australia. The leading professor in Economics Rhonda Sharp who is a world-renowned expert in 'gender budgeting'

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introduced me to the audience at a conference held in the university as, "Monica Das who is an economist turned storyteller". I was overwhelmed by this remark. These words coming from her means a lot to me. This perhaps consolidates my position as a 'story interface writer.'

To dilate further, in this book I have worked on an interface between socio-economic issues and literature. There were many rave reviews about this book in many magazines and journals including India Today and the literary review of Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. One of the reviews published in Hindu, said that, "people read literature separately and read reports about issues surrounding us separately. Hardly does the reader connect the two and try to make more sense of the latter. This book by Dr. Monica Das is a novel way of connecting the two". I felt that in order to get across to the lay reader about the socio-economics pertaining to the girl child in India, it could best be done through a soft medium that is literature. This way the idea gets across to people better for fiction does a brilliant job of articulating facts. One of the ideas behind my book was that 'art reflects life.' Socio-economics I considered as life surrounding us and fiction as a form of art.

Penguin writes in the opening pages of my book, "Monica Das' work on gender studies has been recognised by several universities abroad and she has presented papers on gender issues at various international conferences. She writes articles on India's culture and heritage for several popular journals.

Creative practice invariably imitates life, and literature is almost always a true reflection of the society that it is a product of. The ensemble of short stories in seventeen different languages of India, translated into English has been brought together in this collection. It brings before the reader the

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predicament in which the majority of girls in India find themselves. Written by eminent writers from different regions of India, these stories provide unique perspectives on the way Indian society regards its women. Each story, a masterpiece in its own, is a result of deep insight, acute sensitivity, and the finest craftsmanship." Here I specially wish to mention that I have used Fakir Mohan Senapati's 'Rebati' in the anthology.

In my introduction to the book, the key thoughts contained in it are as follows:

> It is well established that girls in many countries and continents experience the 'Apartheid' of gender from the time they are born. Their fundamental rights to nutrition, health care, education, equality in access to opportunities and, often, survival is restricted or even denied, and they are considered easy prey to physical and emotional exploitation.

Practices of gender inequality greatly influence the socialisation process of women in India. Most households, even today, prefer male children to female because 'they will carry on the family name.'

The situation, so far as the 171.50 million girls in the age group of 0-14 years in India are concerned, is considerably disturbing.

Further, often, in our society, excessive value is attached to traditional roles and responsibilities. A woman's choices are made for her because it is assumed (and she is conditioned into believing) that she can't make her own.

The silent complicity of women that helps reinforce oppressive patriarchy. More often than not, girls are conditioned into accepting and internalising the norms that discriminate against her.

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To dwell on the interface, each of the stories in the book talk about the discrimination meted out to the girl child and the predicament that she is placed in.

Gender constructs pervade every stage of a girl's life. In Mrinal's Pandey's 'Girls,' a little girl, unable to comprehend why she cannot be accepted for who she is, is left wondering, 'Do mother birds too think their girl birds are inferior?' Pratibha Ray's 'Mushi' portrays the predicament of a young girl who is used and exploited for the sole purpose of bearing a legal heir. In 'Mushi' a further fact of emphasis and dramatisation lies in the woman's inherently temporary membership in her natal group. Her realisation that her existence is completely functional as far as her husband and her brother are concerned is tragic. Ultimately, when her son, who is the only meaningful entity in her otherwise pointless existence, is torn away from her, it brings about her demise.

A question frequently asked regarding women has been why women seem to accept and reinforce oppression towards themselves and other women around them. In 'A Memory Called Ammacchi' by Vaidehi, Seetatte is instrumental in perpetuating the cruelties that an outsider inflicts on her own daughter, Ammacchi. Fortunately, Ammacchi is a rebel at heart and gets the better of her tormentor.

What is remarkable is that though these stories originate from different linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds, all of them are concerned with a common objective – to portray the truth about the status of the girl child in India and, perhaps, to instill awareness and a sense of responsibility in those who read them.

The realisation must dawn that despite the stray instances of positive change in the socio-economic indicators, a lot more

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needs to be done in terms of developing and implementing gender sensitisation; that political will and civil society networks must be strengthened and mobilised to combat abuse against the girl child. Thankfully enough, Government of India, through CEFL, has bought 200 copies of this book and has circulated it to 200 different educational institutions in India.

Most significantly, these stories celebrate the spirit of the girl child and her determination to keep hope alive, even as they describe the dismal prospects that surround her.

I am tempted to give here something very contextual and quote here from Anthills of the Savannah by Chinua Achebe, "Only the story can continue beyond. It is the story that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort, without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us."

Below is a picture of the book with the blurb.

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The success of this novel technique of interfacing socio-economic issues with literature in my first book took me on to experimenting it with another book titled 'The Other Woman' (published by Harper Collins). The idea started with my research topic on 'The impact of underage marriages of women in India' on the Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Development Index (GDI). I was invited by International Association for Feminist Economics to present my paper at the University of Boston. Later on, I thought of again doing an interface of this crucial issue of the impact of underage marriages of women in India on the three socio-economic parameters namely level of literacy, level of life expectancy and income earnings. Interestingly enough underage marriages have an overlap with bigamy and polygamy that is rampant in our society. Eventually, the idea of the book 'Other Woman' took roots and finally saw the light of the day. The book very interestingly puts it in a blurb shown below:

eceptive, tenacious and sinful, the 'other woman' seduces husbands, breaks happy and unhappy marriages by playing the dark temptress. She stands as much on the inside as on the outside of the relationship she infringes upon. As lover, girlfriend or second wife, she is not always in the wrong, though she can often end up becoming a victim.

This is the woman, powerful yet powerless, that we encounter in story after story of this unusual collection. Manorama's many men abandon her the day she falls in love with one man. Maganlal Daruwala initiates Shardabai into prostitution and becomes the richest bidder for first nights to her daughter, granddaughter and great-granddaughter. A tribal girl frees Randhir of all inhibitions in a sexual encounter. A man surrenders his body to an older woman as a devotee's offering to a deity. A visitor from home brings along Sunita's little secret from the past, thus shattering the calm of her marital life.

Incredibly moving tales of love and heartbreak, *The Other Woman* brings together the many perceptions of love, lust, fidelity, and the enigmatic 'otherness' of all women.

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Harper Collins Publishers interviewed me and this interview appears towards the end of the book which is an ensemble of stories relating to the topic. The interview goes as follows and is able to bring out the key points besides other things.

An interview with the editor of the anthology, Monica Das

Harper Collins – Q.1 – What triggered the idea of this anthology?

Besides teaching Economics, I have been involved with various women's organisations including the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE) based in Washington DC. In

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the course of my preoccupation with issues concerning women, I realised that the malady of a male dominated society had a cultural context. One hears of various forms of abuse inflicted on women. What caught my attention in recent years was abuse of different kind – the rising trend of bigamy and polygamy with far reaching adverse socio-economic impact. Since literature is a consummate form of representing culture, I thought it would be interesting to study the literary representation of this phenomenon. This led me to think that my concern for this issue would be well served when 'read' through the medium of stories.

Q.2 – How did you go about sourcing the stories?

I searched many libraries in India for stories based on the theme of the 'other woman'. I talked to several academics and social scientists from different regions in India, which helped me gain a perspective on the issue. I found many of the stories including in this anthology in the Sahitya Akademi library and the National Book Trust library.

Q.3 – Did you find some languages had to offer more than others?

I began with a preconceived notion that Bengali literature would have the best stories on this theme. However, it turned out to be a rewarding experience for me to go through short fictions written in different Indian languages. Some I could read in original, the others I read in translation. Finally, I arrived at a list stories in Tamil, Malayalam, Konkani, Urdu, Marathi, Gujarati, Oriya, Punjabi, Hindi and Assamese, and from the best of Bhasha writers. I picked up one story in English too, Makarand Paranjape's Body Offering because its treatment of sexuality is quite unusual and exquisite.

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Q.4 – Did you have any difficulties with the translations/permissions?

I did face some problems with regard to some translations. There was a long Marathi story that I was very impressed with. It ran into many pages and was almost like a novella. I had to drop it since we could not get anyone to agree to translate it. As for permissions, I did not face any difficulties as such. In fact, all the translators and copyright holders were extremely co-operative. The only difficulty was with regard to procuring their contacts.

Q.5 – Do you think these stories reflect a social problem? Are they still relevant in the 21st century?

These stories do reflect a grave social problem. The problem, briefly, is of shortchanging women which has its adversely impact on the socio-economic status of women. Girls are often reduced to being seasonal brides and almost always return home in a year or less, abandoned by the groom, impregnated, and having no forwarding address for the in-laws. But the offence of bigamy is non-cognisable and hence a number of bigamous marriages go unchallenged. The problem is not only relevant in the 21st century, but I should say, more relevant now than before.

Q.6 – Do these stories by way of talking about the 'other woman' help to covey something more other than the problems associated with it?

These stories help to demolish the black and white notions of personal mortality and also hint at the fact that we probably have to realise that unalloyed bliss is no longer the norm today. They also speak of the beauty of a relationship, be it in marriage or outside of marriage. After all, love is a many splendored thing. And what is life, devoid of love and passion, despite the lurking fear of deception.

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Q.7 – How effective is literature in portraying reality?

Literature is a brilliant way of articulating reality. It can bring to the notice of the common reader the socio-economic reality and connections more often than not left unmade. People generally read fiction and media reports separately. That fiction is not divorced from reality is the reality is the point that I wish to maintain. Literature can be said to be looking glass of society and has an innately subversive quality of capturing snapshots of the good and bad happening around us.

Q.8 – Is bigamy entirely a sociological issue?

Bigamy is a socio-economic issue. There are cultural and psychological implications of it too. The problem of bigamy gets compounded when we consider underage bigamy. Incidentally underage marriages constitute approximately 48% of the total marriages happening in India now. This translates to around 1.6 crore to the 2001 children that got married according census report. Moreover, it would be still more startling to note that out of 15 lakh girls who are married under the age of 15, 20% (3 lakh girls) have already borne children at least once (2001 census). This is a huge number and it surely suggests that there could be an overlap between bigamous/polygamous and underage marriages.

Q.9 – What exactly follows from this problem?

Bigamy, especially underage bigamy, adds to the different ways in which abuse occurs and women are often rendered insecure and abandoned. According to the Govt. of India Census report of 2001, data on marital status released in 2005 reveal that 11.7 million Indians (i.e. more than half the population of the Australia and double the population of Singapore, are married underage, and almost the same number, ten million Indian women alone, are living in bigamous marriages. This indicates

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the overlap between underage and bigamous marriages mentioned earlier on. So, if one thought child marriages are largely history in India or fast disappearing, the 2001 census report has a different story to tell. Another interesting fact is that among those enumerated as married at the time of census, women outnumbered men by five million. Since monogamous marriages would mean exactly the same number of married men and women, this could be due to bigamy/polygamy, or put differently can be termed as polygamy. This clearly points to the fact that women are in and out of marriages.

Q.10 – Would you attribute dowry as the reason for bigamy?

Dowry adds another dimension to the issue of bigamy. Insufficient dowry at the time of marriage becomes an excuse for taking another wife.

Q.11 – Do you think this phenomenon has a uniform manifestation in society?

No. depending on the different social strata to which men and women belong, the tonality of the liaisons (bigamy, polygamy) becomes different. With the middle class and upper middle class, the loosening of sexual taboos signals a sea change in how 'Generation now' perceives its relationships.

Q.12 – Is the problem of bigamy and polygamy encountered more in Muslims?

No, strangely enough, it is more predominant among the Hindus. The 1971 census records 45.3 crore Hindus and six crore Muslims. Allowing for women and children to make up 65% of each group, as many as one crore Hindu men had more than one wife in 1971, compared to 12 lakh Muslim men who had more than one wife. The report of the 'Committee on the Status of Women in India' 1974 reveals that polygamy was not

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exclusive to Muslims but was prevalent in varying degrees among all the communities in India. In fact, the report further points out that it is interesting to note that Muslims, most infamous for polygamy, are the least polygamous.

As for child marriages, they seem to be more common among Hindus than in order religious denominations. Hindus account for 79% of the total population below the legal age of marriage but account for 84.7% of all persons married before the age. Incidentally, polygamy is found to be higher in South India than in the north, and more so among rich and middle-class Hindus.

Q.13 – Which stories from the ensemble would you particularly like to highlight in view of the issue of the 'other woman'?

All the stories relate to issues pertaining to the theme of other woman. I would particularly like to mention Mahasweta Devi's Chinta, where the woman who is deceived and deserted by her man is rendered vulnerable and left with a total lack of identity. Recoil by Jayakanthan is a pointer to 'closet bigamy'. Polygamy in Muslims is far better in the sense that women are at least granted legal rights. The case of an under-aged woman in a pre-marital liaison is portrayed in Kishori Charan Das' The Visitor. Body Offering by Makarand Paranjpe is about sexuality and the exhilaration of falling in love. This has special significance in view of the recent provision where adultery has been decriminalised.

Reflecting back, I can easily see as to what triggered off the writing of these 'books with a cause.' The family background, the Fakir Mohan Senapati lineage, the progressive atmosphere in which I was brought up, the modern idea-oriented writings of Mohini Mohan Senapati, the illustrious professor, philosopher and thinker of his times. In fact, I should

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say both father and son were much ahead of their times with a true aristocratic calling to boot. Perhaps all this led to my thoughts being colored by a reformist tinge and feministic outlook. Here, I would like to present my article (The Feminist Perspective in Phakir Mohan's writings) published in a journal released on the occasion of the 'Centenary Celebrations of Fakir Mohan Senapati', held in Bhubaneswar, where an International Award for the best writer of the year, on Fakir Mohan studies, was instituted by Dash Foundation of America. The name of the philanthropist is Dr. Sita Kantha Dash, Chairman & Founder of UAS Laboratories, Minnesota, USA.

Below is the article, titled 'The Feminist Perspective in Phakir Mohan's Writings'

'The apartheid of gender, rampant universally, had always struck a discordant note. Nevertheless, it was glossed over for a considerable period of time. In recent years, however, it has caught the attention of the right-thinking people in general. The movement for gender equality has been one of the defining developments of our time and has now attained global importance. Yet, women, despite having made significant advances in many societies, are still given second priority almost everywhere. Not only that, women face discrimination and marginalisation in subtle as well as in flagrant ways. More often than not, women do not share equally in the fruits of production and constitute 70% of the world's poor. The basic human dignity and fundamental freedoms are often denied to them. In short, the world presents a harsh and dismal landscape to women. Thanks to the predominantly patriarchal norms that overpower her, her true identity stands compromised. Stray cases of feminist protest were noticed in the 17th and 18th century but a more consummate manner of protest was voiced only in the mid 60's and 70's. Since ages literature was the

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vehicle that carried voices of women and helped disseminate these concerns far and wide. Literature and fiction especially short fiction as well as non-fiction were something which helped to articulate the socio-economic and cultural concerns surrounding women. Talking about the eastern region of India, it was Phakir Mohan Senapati, considered one of the leading lights of Indian literature and the father of modern Odiya literature who, in the 19th century through his literary activism fought for the emancipation of women.

Phakir Mohan was born on the 13th of January 1843, in Mallikaspur of Balasore town. Orissa and its society had already been colonised by the British much before his birth and the Christian missionaries had already begun their proselytising activities in Orissa. The English Charity School, established in Cuttack in 1823, was taken over by the East India Company in 1841. Thirteen years before Phakir Mohan was born, the Brahmo Samaj was established and by the time of his birth, many distinguished Bengali intellectuals such as Michael Madhusudan and Debendra Nath Tagore had joined this reformist organisation. Phakir Mohan grew up in a milieu fashioned by these socio-political realities. Thus, his writings had elements which apart from promoting secular attitudes, helped bring about social changes, to which he also contributed directly as the dewan of some of the princely states of Odisha, in British India.

In 1898, Phakir Mohan attended the Madras convention of the Indian National Congress as well as the monotheist convention of the Brahmo Samaj as a delegate from Balasore. In 1917, Phakir Mohan presided over the annual conference of Utkal Sammilani, which had been set up earlier in 1903 to fight for the amalgamation of all Oriya speaking tracts into a separate

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province of Orissa. In that same year he presided over the annual conference of Utkal Sahitya Samaj at Cuttack.

Unlike his contemporary Oriya writers (and also the most Indian writers in other languages), Phakir Mohan Senapati wrote his novels and short stories in the colloquial speech – the living language – of the common people. Phakir Mohan came to draw on this language which had 'desaja' and 'tadbhava' words. The contemporary writers however were using mainly 'tatsama' words. These were words taken from Sanskrit and adapted into the Oriya language. The socio-political movement that occurred in three successive phases, from early 1868 to mid-1870 also had its impact on his depiction of women characters. He presented a more mimetic picture of rural uneducated women with all their virtues and vices.

The dependence of women on their husbands for information, good judgment and fortification can be seen in some female fictional prototypes of Phakir Mohan. Examples are: Saria, the tragic heroine of his celebrated novel Chha Mana Atha Guntha, is a picture of simplicity, innocence, purity and fidelity and service provider to her husband Bhagia. Then we have Champa, who is the evil-incarnate treacherous mistress of landlord Mangraj, who manipulates things to achieve any objective that she sets her mind on. Further, we have the case of Saantani, who is the wife of Mangaraj. She is a virtuous lady, all out to help the people around her. Despite her fidelity and faithfulness to her husband, she is deprived of conjugal bliss, love and care of her wily, covetous husband who is involved in an illicit extra-marital relationship with Champa. Notwithstanding the fact that she was emotionally ruined, her docility, meekness and fortitude remained intact. It's a common practice in fictional discursive strategies to project women as merely trimmings to their male consorts. Women are commonly

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depicted as spouses, mothers and daughters with their innate feminine virtues of docility and softness. However, there have been departures from this stance, as well, where women are depicted with aggressive male traits and fighting capabilities.

In this context so far as Phakir Mohan Senapati is concerned the case can be cited from his "Bharatbarshara Itihas" (1869 and 1870) published in two volumes and written for the purpose of making it a school textbook. In this Phakir Mohan strongly criticized the rebels of the Revolt of 1857 for creating the anarchy in peaceful British India, but praised Rani Lakshmibai for her bravery and valour. The other case to be cited is about the female lead in the novel 'Lachhama' (written in 1901-02, but published in book form in 1914), who fought like a male soldier against the Marathas on the model of Rani Lakshmibai. Dressed in male attire, this Rajput lady Lachhama, driven by exigency fought the Marathas. But Phakir Mohan goes on to add that later however, Lachhama's personality undergoes transformation after reunion with her husband. She retreats into a shy, compliant and passive creature. Thus, Phakir Mohan through his portrayal of Lachhama presents a beautiful combination of bravery and vulnerability.

In the domain of literature women are generally depicted as either pious or as temptresses and a danger to male or family honour. The obligation is put on women to be accountable for man's morality. However, in Phakir Mohan's writings, we do not find such negative iconography of women. To substantiate this fact, one can take his story "Randi Pua Ananta" (1913) as an example. Here, Singhani, a young widow did not waste time in bereavement after her husband's premature death, and became the surrogate masculine figure for her son. When the 'abadhana' or village teacher beats her son, she confronts him like a lioness (Singhani means lioness in the Odiya language) so much so that

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he had to flee the village. Despite the tender care and nurture, her son could not make a mark in his school career. But Singhani's fulfillment and satisfaction comes out loud and clear when she is full of praise for her son's heroic act of trying to save the village from floods. He however dies in the process. It brings out the fact of Singhani's success in inculcating values concerning sacrifice and true manliness in her son. However, grief stricken to the core, she dies subsequently.

In the celebrated story, "Patent Medicine" (1913), written by Phakir Mohan Senapati, the role of women in reforming the home and restoring familial order has been praised. In this story, Sulochana is a good-looking, congenial and is committed to her husband's happiness, but her husband Chandramani is an alcoholic, morally corrupt, visits brothel and neglects his household duties. Unable to bear her straying husband's indecencies coupled with irresponsible behaviour, Sulochana in her bid to reform her husband starts spitting venom in the form of expletives. She even goes to the extent of beating up her husband with a broom to fulfill her objective.

This manner of using unconventional means like a broom is rather anomalous in a virtuous wife. Even the household Brahmin cook was not spared by her. The cook however very kindly dismisses her bad behavior saying "the mistress is a good woman, of good family, and a very good wife. Her heart is definitely in the right place. But she is inclined to be short-tempered and sharp-tongued." Through the servant's statement that describes her pedigree, Phakir Mohan perhaps stands in defense of Sulochana's misdemeanor.

Talking about the feministic perspective of Phakir Mohan's writings, one can draw certain epistemological consequences besides drawing out outcomes for pedagogical purposes. Certain

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specific questions as listed below crop up in our minds after reading in between the lines of Phakir Mohan's literary creations.

List:

a) Construction of womanhood in the male literary field,

b) Issues of male female duality,

c) Do women and men experience the world in different ways?

d) Was historical agency denied to women in colonial and indigenous discourses?

e) In the field of women's studies, can we have an inquiry into gender specificities of class, race and caste for studying the question of identities?

f) Is social conditioning the predominant reason for her distress?

These questions are complicated and demand our attention.

Talking of one of the leading researchers of Phakir Mohan's writings, the name of Sachinanda Mohanty comes up by default. To quote him, the eponymous story "Rebati" is a touching tale of the universal female condition. It's about Rebati's tryst with unmerited suffering in the world and her tragic and untimely death. Sachidananda Mohanty remarks about the story 'Rebati' thus – "Indeed, it is amazing to see how its significance as a feminist literary milestone could have been glossed over for so long, given the compelling factors and circumstances surrounding its composition and the life and times of the writer."

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Dr. Mohanty further goes on to present the back drop to the creation of the story and says "A considerable part of his career, Phakir Mohan spent in teaching, writing and in journalism. He played a pivotal and pioneering role in the "Save Oriya" movement for the preservation of the Oriya language and culture. In his autobiography, he movingly chronicles the travails of physically carting the first printing press to Balasore from Calcutta. His insight into colonialism and its collusion with the native zamindari system that led to the pauperisation of the peasantry (brilliantly recorded in his Chha Mana Atha Guntha) and his account of the Great Famine of 1866 in Orissa sharpen his writings with a deep political consciousness. Historically, Prem Chand dealt with similar themes in Hindi literature after about two decades. In Bengali literature, social realism was not familiar before the twenties, and contemporary Telugu fiction was still largely romantic in character. It is not hard to see the nexus between Phakir Mohan's life and art."

An interesting fact that Dr. Mohanty adds is about the educational and cultural gap between literary Phakir Mohan and his child brides. "The fact of the gap is certain to have shaped the novelist's thinking on the issue of woman's education and her place in society." In Phakir Mohan's acclaimed novel 'Mamu', for instance, the character Chandamani receives instruction in reading, painting and sewing, traditionally valorised as marks of cultivated breeding in females. Similarly, in his 'Prayaschitta', Indumati along with girls of her age is shown to receive education at home. The rationale for this education was made clear: women in the cultivated, middle-class families were perceived as the custodians and transmitters of cultural legacy. What one should observe here in contrast to the characters Chandamani and Saraswati Dei in Mamu and of Indumati in Prayaschitta who were well positioned in the

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confines of their home, the case of "Rebati" was a departure where Rebati's posture can be taken as an act of defiance against the dominant patriarchy and the feudal ethos of the village community of Patapur, most of whose members are indifferent and unsympathetic to her and her parents. This can be taken as Phakir Mohan's indictment on society.

Talking about representation of women in general, Claire Horan goes on to say that "Much of the information we receive about the author's attitude towards women comes from the narrator's statements. Deliberately flighty and inconsistent, the narrator often uses humour to present his opinions. Other times, he comments seriously on what he considers to be general truths".

Claire Horan (Cornell University), in her article "Representation of Women and Gender Relations in Six Acres and a third" (in EPW, dated 18-24 November, 2006) writes "In the narrator's statements concerning women in the novel Six Acres and a third as well as the relationships between female and male characters, author Senapati presents vivid, complex, and non-sexist images of rural women. Many of the narrator's comments reveal his society's injustice towards women and the need for change. Senapati's overall critique of social injustice includes women among its victims and his vision for economic and social reform empowers both women and men." In this context, one would like to quote Satya Mohanty who has labeled Fakir Mohan's 'Chha Mana Atha Guntha' as a work of social inquiry. Satya Mohanty (Prof. Cornell University) remarks "Chha Mana Atha Guntha has been widely praised for its realism – outside Orissa. Chha Mana combines an ironic, reflexive, seemingly postmodern narrative style with the analytical spirit of a work of social inquiry". 'Phakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1980) is one of the paterfamiliases of the Indian novel and has blazed

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the trail of Social Realism in Oriya novels, nay in Indian novels; which till then were romantic in character" says Dr. Boulton, who did his Ph.D. on Phakir Mohan Senapati. Besides Boulton, many others like H.E. Beames, who was at one time the Collector of Balasore, seems to have been deeply influenced by Mamu in writing his novel "The Indian Ink". Prof. Priyaranjan Sen of Calcutta University wrote in his 'Modern Oriya Literature' (1947) "The Atmajeevan Charita or Phakirmohan's autobiography ought to be more widely appreciated than it is now, written in 1917, published in the form of a book in 1927, it is not only a reliable storehouse of information, but also in itself an attractive form of literature, unique in its kind in Orissa and not lacking intrinsic merit at that".

To mention a few more critiques of Phakir Mohan Senapati's writings, U R Anathamurthy and Sisir Kumar Das can perhaps be considered most seminal. U R Anathamurthy has called Fakir Mohan's Chha Mana Atha Guntha a "foundational text in Indian literary history". Sisir Kumar Das (A History of Indian Literature: Vol. VIII 1800-1910: Western Impact: Indian Response. New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 1991) remarks about Fakir Mohan as the first Indian to write a short story (Rebati) in the modern sense. There were others like C.B Halem, R.J. Moore and many more who took serious note of his writings and have published works on that.

What is a marvel is that Phakir Mohan Senapati started his discourse on women in his avatar of a literary activist much before many others in the world? He espoused women's causes much before many others did. Especially considering the fact of examining women's issue from the stand point of creative criticism he was amongst the first few. Activists of feminism came out with their cudgels subsequently. Phakir Mohan went on to soft peddle the issues concerning women through his

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fiction writing by articulating the socio-economic and cultural situations surrounding her. The adversities faced by women pushed them to a corner. She was shortchanged and her status was utterly doomed.

Much later after Phakir Mohan wrote about women's issues, Gender studies came of age in mid-60's and 70's. The first wave and second wave of feminism all showed up to redeem the doomed female existence. The traditionally constructed concept of 'femme fatale' graduated to a more real woman concept – the woman of flesh, blood, sweat, tears and struggle. Now she is raring to go but a lot remains to be done despite Beijing conferences, the CEDAW, the numerous UN policies concerning women, 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao', which is the home terrain version of 'Save the girl child' of the UN and what have you. Phakir Mohan's literary depiction of women and their struggles, as many would agree, has left an indelible impression in the field of feminism. Phakir Mohan, with the help of his wholesome perspective has accorded a special dimension to women's position in society.

Very truly did Mao Tse Tung had said in the twentieth century "Women hold half the sky". Later Nobel laureate Amartya Sen reiterated it and said of women that they are the prospective agents of change. Though this is an acknowledged fact by and large, it has not quite been entrenched in people's minds. What is needed now is the society's support for carrying on the women agenda on a serious footing. For this to take roots, first and foremost, gender sensitisation has to be in place, especially in view of the atrocities committed on women. The media abounds with such news daily. The regressive socio-cultural conditioning regarding girls should be remodeled to give women/girls their due place in society and restore their dignity. It is rather imperative that more than CSR the concept of HSR

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(coined by the author of this article) be put in place to rid the society of the maladies that plague the country in general. HSR stands for 'Human Social Responsibility' meaning humans owe a responsibility towards their fellow brethren. This is imperative for ushering in a just society.

It would perhaps not be wrong to say that Phakir Mohan Senapati paved the way for women's emancipation through his socially realistic depiction of women. This tremendously helped to raise consciousness regarding one of the marginalised sections of society constituted by women. Women are equally important as men if not more, in terms of their pivotal role in society, is an accepted fact. Through his writings, Phakir Mohan has paved the way for a consummate manner of feministic inquiry. No amount of paeans for Phakir Mohan Senapati's contribution to the cause of feminism can be considered enough. Fakir Mohan's writing speaks to us today with the same urgency and freshness as when he set down his words with a quill pen over a century ago. Fakir Mohan Senapati can, in the truest sense, be dubbed as the Renaissance man.'

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CHAPTER 27

Afterword

I owe my gratitude to my family background and parentage for this abiding preoccupation on my part, with issues related to making a dent in the society's maladies. Besides this, I have a crazily nagging thought on humanism. I wish I had a magic wand to wish a way the mindless acts taking place in today's world around religious fanaticism and intolerance. For Fakir Mohan Foundation I have been able to successfully garner support from the young and the not so young people for taking forward our agenda where the main element has been to highlight socio-economic concerns through language and literature. This interface has been with a primary intention of making the whole program sustainable through the medium of language/literature education and otherwise. We have already set the ball rolling and have held many workshops and other literary/language competitions on topics concerning literature that brings to the fore the socio-economic issues/concerns. I strongly believe as would many others, that in modern times there is an utter idealism crisis and idealism as all would agree is so essential for a wholesome mental makeup of the youth. Literature, for sure, provides this safe cocoon where idealism is bred. The strife torn world of today along with the dreadful political haranguing can very soon ring the death knell for young India with sixty five percent of its population under the age of thirty-five and with a total population of 1.25 billion. It is, thus,

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imperative that the youth is geared to its rich heritage, its roots and its identity for its very survival. Our classical literature is a sound resort for preempting gross damage so far as the youth and society, in general, is concerned.

All the great thinkers of the world be it Einstein, Tolstoy, Shakespeare and from our home terrain Rabindranath Tagore, Munshi Premchand or Fakir Mohan Senapati or even the great saints like Kabir, Gurunanak, Shankaracharya, Jesus Christ and last but not the least Lord Shakyamuni Budhha – all had one thing in common in their thinking, that is to make the world a better place to live in, with love at its central theme.

I would just quote one great thinker here who's none other than the great Albert Einstein. Very interestingly he has said, "If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be very intelligent, read them more fairy tales."

He also said, "Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of minds to think."

I believe literature can do this in full measure.

However, the modern-day learning methods are geared to net-learning (learning with the help of the computer) and data-based learning. In fact, it has become fashionable to dabble in data. This is not to discount the importance of data. In fact, data referred to as the 'new oil' by Ambani.

Less cheerful views of what binary digits – those harmless little zeroes and ones that make up data – could create have been aired too, most recently by Apple CEO Tim Cook who warned of a 'data industrial complex'. He goes on to say, "Our own information, from the everyday to deeply personal, is being weaponised against us with military efficiency".

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> "With the data people share via LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, we can analyse their personality with about 80 per cent accuracy"
>
> – Amarpreet Kalkat

Watson Personality Insights, around for three years now, uses models of personality characteristics, needs and values to predict an individual's preferences by analysing their textual data. Deep Sense (a well-known data science company) scores is with its reliability thanks to a training data set of thousands of profiles – and ease of use. Its maps personality on multiple psychometric test scales: The Big Five traits – Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism – referred to as OCEAN; and DISC assessment traits – Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Conscientiousness.

All this to what effect? Aren't we heading towards a cul-de-sac?

To cite some of the modern-day fads on the social networking sites, we have concepts like distilling conversations and social intelligence. Social intelligence is the capacity to know oneself and to know others. Social scientist Ross Honeywill believes social intelligence is an aggregated measure of self-and social-awareness, evolved social beliefs and attitudes, and a capacity and appetite to manage complex social change. Is it going to make people of distilling conversations social intelligence happier people? Is this data and information implosion going to make the world a better place? I leave it to the reader to ponder upon. As for my answer, it is a big NO. There is of course no gainsaying the fact, the dynamics of the age will take people's thoughts to wherever it wishes to go. Albeit, one can urge for a method in madness.

'Evolved social beliefs and attitudes' quoted above, is what concerns us. For this, it is essential that the right kind of education imparts knowledge which shapes people into

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wholesome beings with integrity of character as the core element. It is essential to note that an educated person sans character and integrity is of little or no value. It is rather frustrating to realise that the modern-day progress and development is like a huge architectural marvel built on a white-ant infested land, because the people for whom it is intended, form a weak base. Quality of people should be the central focus. Otherwise, development is like manufacturing a blunt-headed pin which does not serve its purpose. For everything concerns people. In the absence of people's integrity of character everything is an exercise in futility. It is people who would carry things further and build a sturdy nation. Coming to talk about things that surround us – what with food these days, which is really not food? Most of the religious festivals have lost the spirit and retained only the form. The wedding ceremonies reduced to just 'pomp and show'. Beggars on the roads are really not beggars. In fact, air and water lack content, definitionally.

All said and done, one thing is for sure that it never hurts to be grounded. Let the future generation remain humane with a link with their heritage and the time-tested values. Can high-speed technological innovations bring about development leading to physical and mental welfare for the denizens of the earth? Overall welfare should be the litmus test of development. The bottom line is to breed humans with a high degree of sanity and robust integrity of character.

I strongly believe that the practice of language and literature and building consciousness about the macro concerns of the planet and the micro socio-economic concerns can go a long way in obliterating the maladies that plague us. If nothing, it would breed a sense of 'human social responsibility (HSR)' as I would like to put it. This indeed is the vehicle of a process for our moral ablutions. Vyasa Kavi Fakir Mohan Senapati through his various poems has relentlessly appealed to people to guard

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zealously against any departures from this ideal. Fakir Mohan Senapati's body of works is a mine field of knowledge that is multi-dimensional. We have to just dig into it deep in order to gather the gems. In fact, this holds true for all the ancient wisdom penned by leading writers of India and the world. Sometimes, we have to look back to take things forward, tap ancient wisdom and take it as a life- affirming principle.

Hail thy motherland, hail thy planet!

I would like to end with the words of Walter Butler Palmer:

"Dear Ancestor, the place you filled
One hundred years ago
Spreads out among the ones you left
Who would have loved you so
I wonder how you lived and loved
I wonder if you knew
That someday I would find this spot
And come to visit you."

– Walter Butler Palmer

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Dr. Monica Das is the Chairperson/ Managing Trustee of Fakir Mohan Foundation, (FMF), New Delhi. She is currently a member of IAFFE (International Association for Feminist Economics), based in USA. She was an Associate Professor in Economics, Gargi College, Delhi University. Was also, a Fellow, at the Developing Countries Research Centre, DU. She was a visiting scholar at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada for sometime. Her work on gender studies has been recognized by several International Universities. She has presented papers on gender issues and chaired sessions at various international conferences in USA, Canada, Australia and UK. Her book, *Her Story So Far: Tales of the Girl Child in India* was published by Penguin Books India in 2003. Her second book titled *The Other Woman* was published by Harper Collins in 2009. She has written several articles for prestigious magazines/ journals, on Indian art and heritage and on topics pertaining to the socio-economic scenario in India. She has to her credit, a film (docu-drama) titled *Anvesan* made on the life and works Fakir Mohan Senapati, which won a National award for being the best tele-film of the year. *Anvesan* is now with Prasar Bharati Archives. DVDs of the film are now available for sale with Doordarshan, New Delhi.

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I read with great interest Monica Das's *Memoirs and More...* It was absorbing. In *Memoirs and More...,* Monica Das has described in fascinating details her growing up in the tightly knit extended family of Odisha's literary icon and thought leader, Fakir Mohan Senapati.

As a great grand daughter she never met the great man but managed to record glimpses of his personality from those who were near and dear to him. Her dedication to Fakir Mohan inspired her to establish the Fakir Mohan Foundation, a commendable initiative.

Every great personality deserves a Monica in the family!

- **Lalit Mansingh**, Indian Diplomat and former Ambassador to USA

Monica Das's fascinating account of a life lived in the shadow of her great grandfather, Vyasa Kavi Fakir Mohan Senapati, the father of modern Odia novel, admirably performs this task. The narrative of her discovery of Fakir Mohan's place in her life and the meaning of his legacy, chiefly centres around the house Fakir Mohan had built in Bakhrabad in Cuttack and the house in Balasore where he spent the closing years of his life. While recounting the experiences of spending her childhood days at the house in Bakhrabad, Monica Das does more than evoke a lost world of enchantment, and renders the texture of daily life lived in Cuttack years ago. Recounting details of people and events, objects and artefacts, customs and festivals, enrich this account of a world that has become memory. Social historians will find much that is valuable in the narrative.

- **Jatindra Kumar Nayak,** Translator, Literary critic, Columnist, Editor and educationalist; Former professor in Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha

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